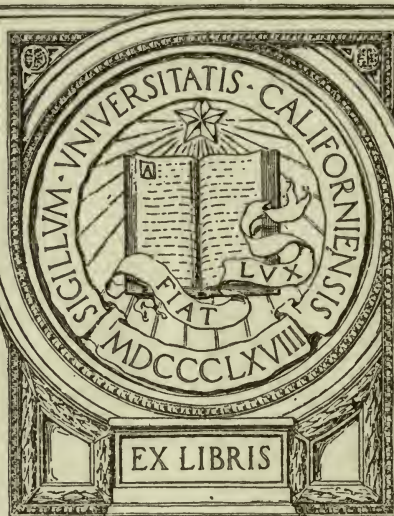


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IMPULSES

OTHER BOOKS BY MRS. HASLETT

"DOLORES OF THE SIERRA, AND OTHER ONE-
ACT PLAYS." "THE TEMPTATION OF ANN
O'BRIEN." (WEST WINDS.) AND OTHERS.

Impulses

STORIES TOUCHING THE LIFE OF SANDY,
IN THE CITY OF SAINT FRANCIS.

BY
HARRIET HOLMES HASLETT



THE CORNHILL COMPANY
BOSTON

add

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class of 1900

TO THE ORIGINAL SANDY


448731

"Life, with Sandy, was a series of impulses. 'Keep your heart and mind working clean,' was his theory, 'and your impulses will be all right.' And with him they usually were."

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IMPULSES



THE CASE OF SANDY

Great preparations were under way for the monthly dinner dance at the Club. These recently inaugurated affairs were a popular success, and Sandy, chairman of the entertainment committee, found himself beset with so much advice from an exacting board of directors, and so many well-meant offers of help from laymen, that he was well-nigh distracted.

Nevertheless he surveyed with satisfaction the order emerging from chaos in the dining-room under the hands of several well-trained men, and glancing at his watch, saw that he had barely time for his self-promised half-hour of quiet before the guests would begin to arrive.

"Keep right along, you're doing fine," he assured the steward. "I'll be back in a little while." Hastily eluding another bit of amateur advice, Sandy escaped to the waiting elevator, and so to the street.

Up the hill a few blocks from the Club, in

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a room on the third floor of "The Blythe Family Boarding House," a girl stood practising on the violin. For three hours she had been at it, and suddenly, as daylight faded, she realized that she was very tired.

A loud rap on the door caused the instrument to slide from the girl's shoulder as with a frightened start she turned.

"Yes?" she answered, and the angular form of Mrs. Blythe, unsavory from the preparation of the evening meal, appeared upon the threshold.

The fortunate Mr. Blythe, long-since departed for an unknown world, had not been responsible for his own name, and such as it was it had suited him very well. Having bestowed it with the rest of his worldly goods upon the woman of his choice when entering the holy estate of matrimony he had been happily snatched away after a brief illness before the misapplication of its cheery significance had had time to embitter his existence.

Such is the impertinence of the human race that this misfit name caused much ill-timed merriment for which Mrs. Blythe could not be fairly held accountable. As she stood now, grim and menacing, surveying her slim young lodger and the bare, unattractive room,

she would appear a melancholy jest indeed to any but the most ironic.

"Did—did you want anything, Mrs. Blythe?" foolishly stammered the girl, for she read the message in the woman's cold eyes.

"Yes, I'm wantin' somethin'," Mrs. Blythe snapped. "I can't have them complaints goin' on any longer. There's them that have nerves in this house, an' they pay fer 'em, an' I've got to consider 'em."

"Oh!" breathed the girl. Her brave brown eyes clouded a trifle. She knew what was coming. She had dreaded it for six whole weeks, while she had watched her shabby, flat, old purse grow flatter, and had cut her meals down from two to one a day.

"They say they can't stand all this scrap-in' an' squallin' any longer, an' that's what."

"You want me to go, I suppose?"

"Yes, I've offers for this room I can't afford to refuse. It's a choice corner."

The gaze of the brown eyes turned to the one window, four feet away from which an alluring brick wall caught the reflection of a parting ray of sunlight. It tried to tell what might be in the glorious world of the real out-of-doors, and the brown eyes caught a gleam of the reflection. Actually it seemed funny.

One might laugh but for the restraining thought of the flat, shabby purse.

"I'm sorry I've been owing you so long, Mrs. Blythe, and I can't give up my practising. It means my living, you know."

"A great, strappin' girl like you oughter be doin' housework or somethin' useful," advised the landlady.

The gleam in the girl's eyes became defiant. "I asked you last week to let me help you do up the rooms for my board," she reminded her.

Mrs. Blythe needed no reminder, and she also distinctly remembered her elaborate rejoinder at the time concerning "fine ladies who were too pretty to be fussing around the rooms of the men lodgers," but she instantly resented the implication of inconsistency.

"There's them that can be impudent," she announced to the opposite wall, "but I ain't got no room for 'em. I'd like this room vacated tomorrow morning, Miss Felton."

Turning on her slatternly heels, the landlady clattered away down the two flights of back-stairs to the kitchen, whence issued the mingled sounds and smells of sizzling fat and other adjuncts peculiar to a dinner in "family style."

Marian Felton mechanically closed the door, shutting out the smoky, sickening odor. Recently she had not been going down to dinner. She was not hungry in the evening, she explained; and each time her healthy young appetite had gnawed resentfully at the lie.

Now, unfortunately, the statement was the truth. It was not the hunger of youthful strength; it was the weakness of poor nutrition, it was deadly nausea—it was sometimes despair. The last-named formed horrible, grotesque shapes during the late hours of the night, that danced about her bed.

The light spot on the bricks outside travelled up—and up—and out of sight. The end of the quiet bow rested on the floor as the girl sat on the edge of her bed, facing the gathering darkness, and clasping the violin, her one friend, to her breast.

Next week an engagement to play for a small club dance would bring her a few dollars, but between then and now would come many meal hours. Afterward nothing appeared on her horizon.

Outside in the busy streets show-windows were being lighted, and gay electric signs flashed out, inviting the passing throng to share in the evening's fun. From the gloom within came thoughts of what one might be

forced to do, and what for several weeks past had been haunting her.

With a quivering start the girl finally came out of her stupor, and springing up she turned on the one light. She brushed and smoothed her disordered dress and hair. Then, slowly from the bureau she took a small, round box. Opening it she dabbed her finger gingerly in its contents and held it up to the light, surveying the rosy tip, and holding it next her pale cheek.

"Great owl-eyes!" she thought. "I hate you!"

Then with sudden revulsion of feeling she cast the box to the floor where it rattled away in circles far under the bed. No, she could never do that—never, never! Better starve, or—yes, there were easier ways than starvation. Presently she would go out and walk a little. There must be someone, surely someone, who would help her without demanding a price.

People had told her that there would be few to aid her to be strong, but many to pull her downward, yet despite all the hard knocks she had received, despite the nightly visitation of grotesque shapes, she still clung to her faith in the kindliness of humanity.

Laying her precious instrument in its case,

she put on her old jacket, hat, and shreds of gloves; then with a stifled gasp when the smoke of dinner met her as she opened the door, she hastened down the stairs and was soon one of the hurrying crowd on the street.

Half a dozen blocks away three men stood on a corner discussing dinner. Not any dinner, but the forthcoming club affair.

Comments in reference to what might be "run in on them" during the evening were being repeated gathered from certain members of the board of directors.

"I'm not going to run in anything on them," declared one, a slight, brown-haired individual with a determined chin,—evidently a person in authority,—“and now I'm going where I can get something to eat.”

"Listen to Sandy!" gibed another. "He's afraid of eating the dinner he's ordered!"

"Go to hell, Dan!" politely and promptly responded Sandy.

"What's the matter with the feed at the Club tonight, if you have to go somewhere else to get something to eat?" shouted Dan, to whom several superfluous highballs had given the impression that Sandy was half a block away.

"Shut your face, Dan, before you're arrested for speeding," suggested the third man,

stepping in front of Sandy, whose chin was assuming a well-known characteristic tilt which it was wise to conciliate.

"There's nothing the matter with the dinner," he asserted with portentous calm. "It's just the dope for you and your friends, Dan, and I've got a table engaged for some of my friends, but just the same, I'm going now where I can get something decent to eat, *with no music.*"

"How's your program for tonight?" asked the third man. "Are you full up?"

"No, I'm short one number," growled Sandy. "That fool Carlton renigged a few minutes ago."

Just then a touch on his arm made him turn to confront the gaze of a pair of sweet brown eyes, while a faltering low voice asked:

"Could—will you give me ten cents to get something to eat? I'm hungry."

Somewhat roughly he shook off the detaining hand. How dared the girl approach him so publicly! But silence came upon the group, and jests of dinner fell flat.

The girl shrank back against a shop window, while the reluctant Sandy stole a glance at the thin, white cheek revealed by the electric light.

Despite his firm chin a warm heart beat in Sandy's breast that never failed to respond to a call of weakness or distress, albeit his stern mind continually strove to reduce it to order and common-sense.

"Say boys, she's hungry all right," he admitted. "I don't care if I do." Stepping up to the girl he gave her a dime.

The third man promptly followed suit, but hilarious Dan noisily jingled a handful of silver in front of the startled girl's face, and flipped a quarter into her protesting hand.

"I—I couldn't," she faltered. "I asked for only ten cents."

"Ten cents, my baby!" chuckled Dan, "What's that for a beauty like you? Come with me, I'll give you something to eat!"

"See here, Dan, cut that out," threatened Sandy. "Can't you see she's not that kind? Shut up, and go home!"

"Shut up yourself! Why doesn't she go home, then, from her work? I guess you don't have to work, eh, my lady?"

Marion drew herself up and measured the man with one deep glance.

"You're drunk," she said, "or you wouldn't talk like that. I don't want your money." She laid the quarter down on the window ledge, and turned to the two other

men. "Thank you for my dinner," she said, and slipped away down the street.

"You brute!" exclaimed Sandy, and started after her. She had gone only a few steps when he caught her.

"I want to talk to you," he said. "You're only a little girl, and you need help, don't you?"

Tears filled the brown eyes. "Yes," she answered. It was all she could find to say just then.

By this time the two others had joined them, bound to be in on Sandy's new game. Annoyed, he glanced up, but otherwise took no notice of them.

"What kind of work can you do?" he asked bluntly; it was his way.

"I play the violin," she answered; "sometimes for dances, or dinners—or—other entertainments."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Sandy inwardly, cursing his unlucky star which had led him to linger on the street corner. Strains of more unwelcome music haunted his unwilling soul. Was there no quiet spot on earth where one could dine in peace, *unentertained*!

Suddenly an idea came to him. Life, with Sandy, was a series of impulses. "Keep your heart and mind working clean," was his the-

ory, "and your impulses will be all right." And with him they usually were. Now this idea—why not? He was short a number on account of that fool Carlton.

"Are you sure you can play?" he asked.

"Sure, I can," she asserted, her face lighting up.

The other men listened, aghast. What asinine act was Sandy about to commit now?

"Go slow, old man," nudged the anxious third man. "If she's a decent musician why is she begging on the street corners?"

Sandy vouchsafed no reply, his own dinner hour was calling him.

"Look here," he told her; "if you're giving me the true dope you come up to the Club to-night at eight o'clock and bring your fiddle with you. Sure thing, I'll give you a job."

Extracting a club card from a pocket-book and scribbling a name on it, Sandy gave it to the girl. "You're sure you're not jollying me?" he urged.

Her only reply was to produce a small card from her jacket pocket. It was a union card and seemed to prove her assertion.

"All right," said Sandy. "You come around to where my card tells you at eight o'clock. You'll find a whole lot of people

there, and you can play for them for, well, the usual price."

"I'll come," she answered, her hands tightly clasped to hold the joy and sobs surging in her tired heart. Then again she slipped away down the street.

"You're a damn fool, Sandy," guffawed Dan, slightly sobered, though still doubting.

"That's where you're mistaken, old top," responded Sandy. "It's you who are that kind of fool! And now I must beg to be excused," he continued, politely ironic. "I must go *and eat.*"

At eight o'clock the handsome Club rooms were filled with light, warmth, and a cheerful crowd. As it was Ladies' Night, feminine curiosity was being appeased with that rare and unusual behavior assumed by the club man when he allows his womenkind to invade his own special and particular quarters. Pleasantries, such as, "good old chap!" and "I get you, old man," now circulated where to-morrow the same circumstances would bring forth terse profanity and invitations to warmer climes. All was serene, and "what good times men had among themselves, hadn't they?"

Numerous round tables accommodating

lively groups varying in number from four to ten filled the large dining-room. At one end on a small stage an orchestra did its popular ragtime best to aid digestion. It was the laudable intent of the entertainment committee to have "something doing every minute," and thus far there had been no noticeable lapses.

Only by possessing several astral shapes could the ordinary person have accomplished what came into the course of the ubiquitous Sandy's evening when he had an affair in charge. Just now he was doing three things. He was raising his finger as a signal for the orchestra to play an encore; he was assuring the lady who occupied the seat beside his vacant chair at table that he never ate dinner, but that he would soon be overjoyed to occupy that chair simply because she was there; he was consulting his watch and discovering that it was eight o'clock, and thinking (fourth occupation) "that darned girl isn't coming after all. I was a fool to think she would."

Dexter, the desk clerk, touched his arm. "There's a lady in the reception-room to see you, sir."

A sense of renewed faith glowed through Sandy. "Good! She's here," he thought. "I'll come," he said, and a half-minute later he

stood before Marian Felton where she sat waiting in the great, softly-lighted room. His keen glance took in all the pitiful attempts at making herself presentable for the evening, but his manner showed nothing of this.

"Well, you're here," he said genially. "I knew you'd come."

She looked up in great surprise. Had he ever doubted it?

"Of course," she answered.

"Did you get some dinner?" he asked thoughtlessly, and then felt ashamed. Twenty cents between this frail little creature and starvation—or something worse!

"Oh, yes!" A silly lump in her throat prevented her saying anything more just then, and she fumbled with her music-roll instead.

"Let me have a look at your selection," said Sandy.

She spread out an assortment, classical, ragtime, popular—the usual medicore thing.

"All right, let's have a go at these," he suggested, laying three aside. "You may play early, if you like, and have it over, eh?"

"Oh, I'm not nervous!" smiled the girl, with a quick, indrawn breath. She was not nervous, no, not now; but two hours ago she had been, and one does not recover quickly on two rolls and a bowl of broth.

Applause following the orchestra encore sounded, and several committee-men looked about for their chairman. No interval was allowed for worry because miraculously Sandy appeared at that moment on the stage from behind the scenes. There were those, especially the lady with the blue eyes who sat beside his vacant chair, who could have sworn that he had left the dining-room by the main door leading toward the big reception-room, yet there he was near the piano laying some sheets of music in front of the pianist, and setting up a stand for a slight, young violinist who was visible in the background. A moment later he announced that Miss Marian Felton would now contribute to the pleasure of the evening with several violin numbers.

Careless diners glanced up from their plates or partners, then down again. Entertainers come and go; so few make any permanent impression in these blasé times. But one after another the diners glanced up again. What a queer gown Miss Marian Felton wore for an evening affair. Why, on close inspection it looked shabby; and what weird eyes she had, set in a small, pale face!

This was a dinner, however, not a concert, and conversation droned on with little abatement during the first selection.

"Picked her right up off the street not two hours ago. Now what do you know about that?" he hiccupped.

Later, he was strenuously admonished to desist, but not before his irresponsible tongue had wagged freely, slinging mud where only pure gold would stick.

Silence gradually came upon the room. What was this the girl was playing? No one could place it, yet everyone had heard it before.

Something caught and held remote memories, bringing out from dim corners the scent of a rose, the feel of a hand, the low cadence of a voice, all—all these things which are laid away in the hidden chambers of each heart, whether the reality, or the secret desire for them—under layer upon layer of convention, materialism, or any of the many excuses which accomplish the same purpose.

While she played the sweet old air with an accompaniment of her own interwoven with many chords and thrilling little trills like early morning bird-calls, Miss Marian Felton's eyes glowed and danced as though they were reflecting a lake of living fire, and her cheeks flushed a glorious pink. Her magic bow drew her audience, willing and unwilling, wherever it chose to lead them.

Truthfully speaking it was nothing out of the ordinary, but Sandy, standing in the wings, saw much that the casual audience could not.

"Brave kid!" his kind heart thumped to his stern mind, where it was promptly commanded to "shut up!"

A perfunctory round of applause greeted Miss Felton's first effort and she looked uncertainly in Sandy's direction. He gave her an encouraging "hand," so she raised her violin again.

As the accompanist enquiringly lifted another sheet of music the girl shook her head. "I'll play alone this time."

And then a strange thing happened at a Ladies' Night Dinner. Because it was Sunday, perhaps, and in spite of the most hardened, Sabbath-breaking habits, there are things one cannot forget; or, perhaps, there was something unusual about the girl after all—was it pathos, or what? Or was it because people do have hearts, much as they strive to conceal them?

While it was taking place, down in a corner farthest from the stage, Dan was giving his own half-tipsy version to a few congenial pals, of "Sandy's latest."

The "third man," seated beside Dan, swore fearfully into that talkative person's ear, adjuring him to hold his tongue, which command Dan immediately put into literal practice, yet did not receive the expected laugh.

"Say, she *can* play!" admitted the "third man." "Gee, that's some tune!"

The plaintive air wailed itself away in three or four lingering notes. The pink flush faded, the eyes grew tired. The bow almost slipped from a nerveless little hand, yet Miss Marian Felton was ready to receive her applause when it came. A moment of silence preceded it. There were lumps in throats to reduce, there were layers upon layers of deadening material to be replaced, there were doors seldom opened to be relocked. Sandy, in his sheltered corner, hammered on his chest to dislodge a horrible obstruction, and winked rapidly, calling himself all kinds of an idiot. Then the applause burst forth, long and insistent.

The glow and flush came again as the girl looked down on the sea of clapping hands and waving napkins. Then another of Sandy's impulses arrived, swift, and fatal to his peace of mind until carried out. Taking the girl's hand, after he thought she had received

enough encouragement from her audience, he raised his own for silence.

"Miss Felton will play again for us," he announced. "Meantime let us do something to try and show her what we really think of her. Here's a starter!"

Snatching up her old-fashioned sailor-hat from an off-stage chair, he tossed a coin into it. "Go to it, boys!" he cried to the astonished crowd, and before anyone realized what was happening, least of all Miss Marian Felton herself, she was threading her way in and out among the tables, playing again sweet snatches of the heart-stirring air, while close behind followed Sandy, extracting contributions with a mixture of ingratiating persuasiveness and vengeful threatening impossible to resist.

An enthusiastic mob spirit took possession of the crowd. Men dug down with cheerful alacrity into the pockets of their Sunday trousers and brought forth coins both large and small, while women rummaged in their sweet-scented bags and vanity-boxes to see if by chance they had tucked in some carfare.

It required no explanation from Sandy why he was establishing this precedent, if as such it would be regarded. One look at the pathetic, much-mended gown of white cotton

crêpe would have been enough without the added reason of the brown eyes, far too large and bright for the white face. The women saw the gown, and wondered what they had in their cedar chests that would fit her. The men saw the eyes, and ruminated on the cause of them, and wondered also.

In one noticeable quarter only was this move of Sandy's regarded with disfavor. At a table near the center of the room sat several of the august board of directors. A rumor of Dan's flighty remarks had reached them. This and a chronic unrest caused by Sandy's unexpected movements upon all occasions, made them regard any action of his with suspicion.

Time and again it had been agreed in solemn conclave that something must be done with him, and the present appeared to be one of the sample cases for deliberation.

In the midst of the general enthusiasm, however, the dignity of this group was not especially observed save by Sandy's all-seeing eye, and the sight caused him, as ever, a great and unholy joy.

The worn old sailor-hat performed its office nobly, and after the first bashful plunge into this novel occupation, its owner went through the ordeal bravely, happily, turning now and then toward her leader in the enter-

prise for guidance. She allowed even Dan's tainted quarter to drop in with the rest, giving him a faint smile of restored good-will as she passed.

Walking in and out as though in a maze she finally reached the center table at which sat the aforesaid august board members, but seeming to feel the chill as she approached, she looked at them apprehensively, then veered away toward Sandy.

"You've got enough! Oh, far, far too much!" she protested. "I can't take any more."

It was wise not to press the point, so Sandy steered her past the table without comment, reading upon the averted faces, with grim satisfaction, what was coming to him on the morrow. There was a directors' meeting scheduled for the next morning at ten.

When they returned to the stage the orchestra leader came quietly to Sandy.

"Us fellows want to help," he said casually, waving his hand comprehensively toward his brother musicians. A five-dollar piece clinked down into the heap of silver, and between Sandy and the orchestra leader there passed a sense of that divine touch which is said to "render the whole world akin."

An hour or so later the old sailor-hat had

resumed its regular occupation of covering Marian Felton's head, and a little canvas cash-bag furnished by the desk clerk held the comfortable assurance that she could occupy Mrs. Blythe's choice corner several weeks longer.

The girl was trying to tell Sandy this as she received the fat little bag from his hands, but she could not, and he, being a man of few words on certain subjects, sympathized, but could not help her.

"I enjoyed my dinner so much," she said, referring to the good meal which had been served to all the entertainers at a table of their own when the program was over; "and—and—it was all beautiful, Mr.—Mr.—but I don't know your name, do I?"

"I have so many you could never remember them all," he answered whimsically. "Most people call me Sandy. Let it go at that."

"I can never thank you, Mr. Sandy," she stammered. "I—"

"Don't try," he answered brusquely. "I've cut 'thank' out of my dictionary. I don't know what it means."

"Oh, but you do!" she protested, "and I want so much to—". But Marion found her-

self talking to rapidly retreating footsteps. Sandy had fled.

Next morning Miss Felton went down to breakfast, something she had not done lately, and afterward Mrs. Blythe received three weeks' back rent for her choice corner which suddenly appeared to be again at its present occupant's disposal. Incidentally Miss Felton also dined that evening, and thereafter resumed the regular habit of dining with a growing and healthy young appetite.

The august board of directors met according to appointment at ten, and under the head of new business, although it was really old, they discussed the case of Sandy.

"This thing has got to be stopped, you know," announced one of the super-august; "this establishing a precedent of that sort, picking up girls off the street and bringing them in here, and subjecting our guests to an exhibition of maudlin sentimentality."

"Yes," all agreed, "it should be stopped."

But how?

It was proposed to summon the chairman of the entertainment committee and hear what he himself had to say about the matter. So Sandy was sent for. This was the usual procedure of the august board.

Having just finished his breakfast the in-

dividual under discussion came without protest, his toothpick poised at an aggravating angle. Accepting the chair offered him, he sat down and removed the toothpick.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he remarked with disarming friendliness, and awaited their pleasure with the guileless air of a school-boy. Anything would have been easier to combat than this simple attitude. The august board suddenly and secretly to itself appeared entirely in the wrong.

The chairman of the board cleared his throat, the chairman of the entertainment committee listened solicitously.

"Ahem!" began the chairman of the board. "You have been summoned before this meeting to explain, if you can, the peculiar incident which took place during last evening's performance. The honor of this club demands that—" His words trailed off into inadequacy, confronted by Sandy's infantile bewilderment.

"Incident?" he queried, reflectively resuming his toothpick.

"Yes," continued the chairman, encouraged by the reassuring calm of his colleagues. "We feel that an affront has been offered our guests, I might say an insult, to the ladies especially, which we shall find difficult to oblit-

erate. It was our intention in establishing this custom of Ladies' Nights to bring our guests here assured that they would find the atmosphere of the home. I shall now feel obliged to apologize to each one of them for the embarrassing, not to say disgraceful, position in which they were placed by the introduction of this girl off the street who—"

During this arraignment the accused had slowly stiffened, and the infantile demeanour slipped away leaving the alert man of action.

As the chairman reached his last insulting sentence Sandy rose to his feet, and his ready tongue was about to cut in with a scathing rejoinder when Dexter suddenly interrupted the meeting with the information that Sandy was wanted at the telephone.

"Excuse me a moment, gentlemen," said Sandy, and went out to the office 'phone.

Several board members shifted cigars and feet, but no one spoke. Then the telephone on the table at the chairman's elbow buzzed, and he took the receiver off the hook. Those watching him wondered at his varying facial expressions, although he said very little save, "I see," and "Certainly, Madam," and added other polite speeches demanded from a gentleman when a lady 'phones. How glad he was that the board members could not hear the

whole of what he was later compelled to give them the gist!

Now the lady was a woman of distinction and discrimination, of great influence in club circles, whom they had been proud to have as their guest. She was the blue-eyed lady who had sat beside Sandy's vacant chair at table.

"I wanted to speak to the chairman of the entertainment committee," she began, "and I have already exchanged a few words with him regarding that talented young violinist who entertained us so charmingly last evening. He has switched me on to your 'phone, as he says you can give me some information concerning her." So the pleasant, womanly voice continued, telling of the pleasure all the guests had enjoyed, and what she thought of the splendid action which had turned the tide of popular emotion flowing toward the needy young girl with such substantial results. "It was one of the best things I ever witnessed," she assured the embarrassed chairman of the board, who longed to hang up the receiver, but was deterred by his ever-ready but often misdirected sense of club honor.

"It would be better for all of us to be waked up oftener from our selfish apathy," went on the lady. "I want to help that girl. I have asked for her address. She's a

genius, frail little mite, and I can keep her busy for awhile."

"Very well, Madam, certainly," responded the chairman of the board, mopping his brow.

Here Sandy appeared on the threshold, his mantle of simplicity again enveloping him. The chairman was powerless between the serenity of his gaze and the open telephone.

"Kindly give the lady the information she wishes at the office 'phone," commanded the chairman gruffly. "And, by the way, owing to lack of time, your case is dismissed this morning."

"Very good," responded Sandy politely, retiring to close the conversation rather abruptly with the clubwoman. Her laudations of his own unpremeditated act embarrassed him.

The chairman of the board made very few remarks suffice for his explanation to the astonished members. This, however, was no unusual occurrence, and thus once more by unanimous consent the case of Sandy was "laid upon the table."

THE HOBO DINNER.

The whole glory of the affair rested with Sandy. It covered him like a coat of many colors, whereof blame, inconvenience, recrimination, the overwhelming personal twist to himself, and many other phases formed the resultant hues.

It was just in line with all his crazy notions, the board of club directors declared, when the plan was "sprung upon them." They yielded to it, however, as they usually did to his schemes.

The idea came to Sandy about two o'clock one dismal afternoon as he walked through the square from his comfortable luncheon.

Why not give a hobo dinner at the Club?

There they sat in rows on the park benches, all degrees and dimensions of the genus "hobo," from the "gentleman in reduced circumstances," to the veriest bunch of rags that ever tramped the ties, only that morning arrived from a dusty railway journey.

"Poor ginks!" mentally ejaculated Sandy,

genially conscious of his own well-filled interior. He regarded their varied shapes and hungry eyes with more than usual interest. Sandy was always observant during his walks about town, and read many a story in the lines of a face or the glance of an eye.

No doubt the stories were often wrong, but right lay in the human interest expressed. Away back in his mind lay the memory of a younger brother. Donald was a lad of ten when Sandy, a man of twenty, had left home. They had never met again, those two, but during the intervening years the gradually lessening news from home had been more and more unfavorable concerning Donald.

Finally Donald also had left home, a slave to drink, and the great Canadian forest country had swallowed him up. That was many years ago, and now no one ever gave him a thought, save the mother-heart at home which never forgets; and occasionally a brother or sister held a fleeting impression of Donald's presence in far-off childhood games.

Nothing annoyed Sandy more than the imputation of "brotherly love," or "the hand of fellowship" held out to suffering humanity, yet results often proved directly contrary to his professed methods of action. Just now he reflectively considered the "poor ginks."

They grilled in summer and froze in winter on those corrugated benches. Apparently they never left them. How did they subsist? Who cared whether they went or stayed?

Sandy could testify that the midnight and early morning hours found them there, stretched only in slightly different attitudes from those of mid-day. What a pleasing pastime it would be jauntily to crook a forefinger in one of their stupid faces late some afternoon and say: "Come along with me! You're invited to dinner at the Club. Excuse a late invitation," and then side-step the astonished owner of the face to the best meal he had enjoyed for who knows how long!

During his short diagonal walk through the well-filled park Sandy apportioned one guest apiece to each of his fellow clubmen. A bath, a dinner, and a bed appeared on the program of each, for after surveying the first half-dozen prospective guests the bath naturally presented itself to the imagination; and after a bath and a good dinner, why not a smoke and a bed? Something cheering to drink was another item. Sandy's impulses were often elaborately logical.

His enthusiasm bounded and leaped. Before he left the square there was no hobo either dirty enough or hungry enough to sat-

isfy his craving for well-doing. He was aware that there are various degrees of caste in trampdom, and over there in vacant lots beyond the Club, or behind the walls of old buildings about to be renovated, he knew of choice specimens of humanity far too low to associate in broad daylight with these higher grades who occupied comfortable park benches.

He knew just the spot to which he would go in search of his hobo. He had noticed him, not individually, but in groups of four or so, skulking about in shadowy corners by day, and creeping out by night to accost a passer-by for change, always being careful to keep out of sight of a member of "The Force."

Perhaps also he would tip off a few of "the fellows" as to where these special favorites of misfortune were to be found, but he was not sure about this. It might be he would reserve them all for himself from which to choose the most wretched of the bunch. No doubts assailed Sandy. A plan once formed needed only his firm will to carry it through. Impatience to issue his invitations caused him to look at his watch. Too late for today; his afternoon was full. Besides, a short interval would be needed for certain judicious preparations.

Quitting the park he turned down the street, his mind reverting for a moment to a recent board meeting in solemn conclave over an episode in which he had played a prominent part. A reminiscent smile curled his lips. This also would be a success if he set his mind on it. So down the street he went, with quick step and eyes alert to all the shifting scenes through which he passed, yet when he arrived at his destination to keep a tiresome business engagement the details of menu and decorations were already planned for the "Hobo Dinner."

The following afternoon the late sun rays beat pitilessly down into a dusty vacant lot only a few streets away from well set-up clubdom.

Several male specimens of weary humanity draped themselves in corners as far removed from each other as possible in the few feet of shade afforded by a rickety board fence. During the next fifteen minutes two of these forlorn persons were to be invited to dine, but they were not aware of it.

In fact had any one had the temerity to prophesy the invitation he would have been promptly cursed into a fiery future.

To only one of them had a definite plan

presented itself for the evening. It was well-formed, and at a chosen time was to be carried out.

Weary and emaciated, he leaned against the fence with closed eyes, his fingers nervously twisting the wisps of straw and other bits of dry stuff surrounding him. In the group he was the most abject sample of misery, yet a certain air of gentility distinguished him from the others—something which marked him to be let alone when a sympathetic unity drew the rest together for a discussion of their rights and wrongs.

Every now and then the man glanced up at the sun, and at the slowly lengthening shadows. Once he drew a small, black phial from his pocket and fingered it without looking at it. He had carried it about with him for a long, long time. He knew quite well what it looked like, but he wanted to make sure it was there, ready to lend its aid when he needed it. It had lain in his pocket, burning—calling,—and on three separate occasions he had nearly yielded to its insistence, yet each time he had resisted. A sense of repugnance and rebellion over acknowledged defeat, bade him cling to life. But now he was ready to declare himself beaten. He found himself one of those at whom he had

often jeered: one of the great army of "Down-and-Outs."

He replaced the phial carefully. It was too early yet for his purpose; he was waiting for a signal. When a certain whistle sounded the siren call which ordered the laborer to put up his kit for the day, he intended to quit work himself—to leave off this weary job of living. Shifting his limbs, he dozed a little.

He was aroused by the sound of two voices on the sidewalk slightly above him and just outside the fence.

"We'll find four or five in here," declared one. "You can bet your life, Dan, this is the headquarters of the 'Down-and-Out' Club."

"All right, Sandy, sail in and pick your man. Of course you get first choice for the guest of honor," replied the other.

With the pleasant sense of sharing a rare treat with a favorite pal, Sandy applied his eye to a convenient knot-hole.

"I can spot four over there in the opposite corner," he whispered excitedly. "Great luck!"

"Say, won't they murder you if you don't invite them all?" quavered Dan, visibly weakening now that the crucial moment had arrived. That morning among a joshing crowd of fellows at the Club it had appeared an easy

and highly witty thing to do, airily to issue an invitation for dinner, but Dan now found himself mentally selecting the smallest hobo in the group when Sandy thoughtfully loaned him the use of the knot-hole for a few minutes, wondering how he could separate the chosen one from the others without dissension and possible assault.

Such vain forebodings had no place in Sandy's make-up. "Get a hunch on," he urged. "It's late, mon."

Advancing a few steps to where several loose boards in the fence made a convenient entrance, Sandy leaped confidently down into the dust, intending to choose his man during a hurried, though careful trip across the intervening space. He took only three steps, however, for there at his feet lay his guest. There was no doubt about it. The slanting sun rays caught him full in the eyes and he almost fell across the man. Something held him there as he looked down at the heap of dingy clothes. He opened his mouth, and the words came forth not at all as he had planned.

"Hello, you lazy gink! What are you doing in my way?"

The man opened his eyes and gazed straight up at Sandy. There was a half-minute's silence between them; then it was

broken by the first discordant sounds of the city whistles, gradually growing louder and more uniform, as one after another from different parts of town they joined in the announcement that the day's work was done. The tramp fumbled vaguely in his pocket, then resentfully withdrew an empty hand.

"Hello! How are you?" pursued Sandy more genially.

An unintelligible murmur was all the response he received, but the tramp slowly struggled to his feet and gazed menacingly at the two men confronting him, Dan by this time having carefully insinuated himself between the loose boards and landed in the dust heap beside his valiant leader.

Sandy, with a sudden recurrence to his plan of action conceived on the previous afternoon, crooked a forefinger in the dazed, dusty face, and smiled.

"Come along with me! You're invited to dinner at the Club. Excuse a late invitation!"

"Huh?" questioned the man, not showing a trace of either joy or gratitude. After all, hoboes were complicated individuals, not wholly composed of hunger, thirst and thievery. Sandy forthwith hurled himself into a sea of explanations. Meantime a short, wiry

person with a swarthy, lowering cast of countenance, separated himself from the group of four on the opposite side of the lot, and approached warily to see "what was doing."

Dan seized opportunity as it came near. "Here's mine!" he joyfully announced, springing toward the astonished tramp with such celerity that the latter retreated in alarm with disturbing visions of hand-cuffs. He stopped, however, when confronted by Dan's cheerful countenance, and in response to the query whether he had anything to do that evening, replied:

"Not a damma t'ing," in a soft Italian voice which knocked Dan "dippy," as he afterward explained.

In genial conversation they returned to Sandy and his chosen guest, where the situation had little changed.

"What's yer little game, mister?" the tramp muttered, his suspicious eyes shifting from one to the other of the three, then focusing upon the other end of the lot. The others followed his gaze, and beheld three ragged figures disappearing one by one over the back fence. Assailed by fears of arrest they vanished into the lengthening, western shadows.

The tramp's gaze shifted back again to

Sandy's frank countenance. Then the Italian chipped in.

"Say, ole pal, wot yer waitin' fer? De game's alla de right, see?"

The steady flow of Sandy's explanations, coupled with his convincing manner, was slowly taking effect. Also there was some mysterious influence at work between them which neither could understand. The tramp straightened his emaciated form and withdrew his hand from his pocket where it was again fumbling. The many-toned whistles had sounded their last call for the day. With a twist of his broad shoulders he shook himself free from something well-nigh overmastering, and turned his weary footsteps into this new pathway presented by Sandy.

"All right, mister; go ahead," he assented less gruffly. "It's a queer game ye're playing, but I guess ye're playing it straight."

A strange quartette left the vacant lot. It required some nonchalance and a fair amount of courage to accomplish the passage along five blocks of crowded city streets. An alert, slight figure led the way. A step or two behind him followed the "guest of honor," heavily dragging one foot after the other in his reluctant return to life.

Dan, well-groomed, and with the virtuous

air produced by a month on "the water-wagon," advised his tricky-looking companion as to the evening's program. He dwelt at length upon the nobility of Sandy's scheme. To him was conceded the palm of having planned this affair where all might meet as brothers. It is doubtful just how much the Italian understood. He had but lately arrived from his native shores, but he assented to all assurances with eager professions of brotherly love, his beady eyes, meanwhile alert to the possible value of Dan's watch fob.

Arrived at the Club entrance they found a motley assemblage waiting for the elevator. Four other members had rounded up their men and were proudly conducting them, in varying degrees of doubt, to their destination.

There appeared a decided lack of that clannishness usually attributed to the wandering class. Each tramp ignored his fellows and sedulously attached himself to his own personal conductor. The alert little Italian was the sole exception. He adopted a fraternal spirit, but it was received with marked disfavor by the other five. A sturdy Swede, Carlton's particular "find," regarded him with especial distrust, making it evident to their hosts that a diplomatic distance between the two should be preserved.

Upstairs they gathered in groups, and by twos and fours, until the fifteen clubmen who had fallen under the spell of Sandy's suggestion had safely housed their guests. Then began a scene of turmoil not soon forgotten by the participants.

An announcement on the blackboard early that morning of the forthcoming event had nearly caused a riot among conservative, comfort-loving members, but that was nothing compared to the excitement which now prevailed.

All looked to their leader for guidance. He had never failed them before, he did not now. He issued commands right and left, in brief and often picturesque language, well-attuned to hobo comprehension. Sandy had spent several early years in frontier towns himself, and his ears had always been wide open.

Enthusiasm which at noon had been based only upon theory now burst into the fullness of reality. All over the bedroom section bathtubs were heard filling, and new plans sprung into being from minute to minute. The next logical step from baths being fresh clothing, a wholesale turning out of closets and bureau drawers began. In half an hour an impromptu Misfit Parlor was doing a lively business. As in all great undertakings, new com-

plications confronted the distracted leader at each step. His own guest towered above him a good six inches, while the wiry little Italian could have wrapped Dan's capacious garments twice around his person. Hence a general exchange of guests, solely in the matter of clothing, took place, each member in all other matters being responsible for his own "find."

Sandy found himself beset on every side with questions, and bits of information concerning individual plans which were not working out according to expectations. For instance, "that idiot, Wright," in a true spirit of hospitality, had treated his guest, on entering, at the Club bar. Result: a deep sense of injury apparent among half-a-dozen other guests, and several private libations. While their trusting hosts left them alone with their bath water and borrowed clothing, two thirsty hoboes devoted the time which should have been given to these chastening influences to the more certain enjoyment of the contents of short, thick-necked bottles concealed upon their persons. When discovered half an hour later they were sleeping soundly, the bath water still flowing, and no human efforts at that moment could arouse them. Incidentally some of the surplus water found

its way into the library below, and eventually created a musty, moiré effect, usually a feature of antique editions, upon various cloth and leather bindings. The time spent in mopping up consumed most of the dinner hour for the two members responsible, but no one missed them in the general *mêlée*. Keys were turned upon the sleeping delinquents and two vacant chairs among the hoboes marked their absence from the feast.

During the trying on of clothes the big Swede ran against the little Italian.

"Ah lak you kip ouda mah way, you damn t'ief!" growled the Swede in the other's swarthy ear.

An eloquent stream of choice Italian expletives flowed from the latter's lips which so enraged the Swede as they struck his uncomprehending ear that his great hand reached out and grasped the other's coat collar. More correctly speaking it was a navy blue serge coat of Sandy's that moment transferred to the Italian's back. But the latter was too agile for the Swede. Twisting himself free of the sleeves with a quick, backward movement of the arms and grabbing his old coat from the floor as he ran, the Italian fled down the hall, the big man in hot pursuit.

The unanimous impulse was to stop the

Swede. It was like preventing the proverbial angry bull from damaging a china shop. No one thought to stop the Italian. He sped down the little-used stairway, and far up the street.

Six blocks away he stopped and drew breath, looking furtively behind him. Few pedestrians were in sight, none showed the slightest interest in him. He felt joyously in two bulging hip pockets, and chuckled in low, sweet Italian tones. Turning a corner he passed on more slowly and was lost once again in the realms of the submerged brotherhood.

Meanwhile three of the huskiest club members wrestled with the big Swede. Sandy's hands itched to get at him, but he restrained his pugilistic desires and inquired discreetly what all the row was about. The pertinence of this simple question appealed to all bystanders. Gradually, limb by limb, the Swede was released and allowed to explain. Only a linguistic scholar could have disentangled the furious medley of words, but certain expressions recurred with alarming frequency.

"T'ief! — Damn t'ief! — Doin' tahme. — Call poleese mahne!" — in time became convincing.

"He recognizes the Italian as a thief, boys. That's what's the matter, he's been 'doing

time!' Suffering cats, I wonder how much he's done us for!"

Carlton clapped his hand on his hip pocket. It was empty. While he, the most genial of "fitters," in his shirt sleeves, had pronounced Sandy's coat just the thing for the Italian, the latter had chosen that moment to appropriate Carlton's neat little revolver. His sapphire scarf-pin was also missing.

Dan, to whose door would roll the blame for his unwise choice of a guest, in perturbed moments habitually fingered his watch fob. He sought its consolation now. It was not there. His watch was also absent. Words failed him; he started down the hall.

"Stop him, boys!" shouted Sandy. "He's desperate. Lock the bar-room door!"

"Let me go!" yelled Dan. "Damn the bar! I'm off to catch that little dago thief."

"I'm with you!" shouted Carlton, and together they bolted to the elevator, and from thence out on a fruitless search into the night.

All this and many similar matters had occupied much of Sandy's attention. Necessarily his own guest, who proved quiet and tractable, was left to himself. When Sandy had taken him to his room, the man had stood gazing about, first at the photographs and other pictures, books and many keepsakes,

then back again at Sandy, with disturbed curiosity growing in his hungry eyes.

"What's the matter?" asked Sandy with abrupt kindness.

"Oh, nothing! Only this is the first time anything like this ever happened to me. Am I dreaming, mister, or what?"

"Call it 'what,' if you like," responded Sandy; "but you'll find it a bit real before you get through."

The tramp came and stood very close to him, looking down with deeply penetrating eyes.

"What are you doing it for?" he demanded. "Are you one of those reform chaps?"

"Good Lord, no!" exclaimed Sandy with impious horror. "I detest reform."

"So do I," said the tramp sullenly. "I'd have been a *man* long ago if a lot of blooming relatives hadn't started in to reform me."

Inadvertently he had hit upon Sandy's especial "bête-noire."

"To hell with relatives!" quoth Sandy with cheerful hospitality. "I never let them bother me. Indeed a man's much better without any!"

The tramp regarded Sandy with growing intensity. "You're not like the others," he said slowly. "You talk different."

"How 'different?' "

"There's a bit of the old country in your speech."

"You're away off, I'm an American," protested Sandy. "Look here, I haven't time to discuss nationalities. You just get busy." He threw open the door of his bath-room. "Tumble in and make yourself at home while I chase up a change for you. You're hardly my size, you know." Then he hurried off into the confusion reigning in the hall.

Left alone, the tramp went slowly from one object to another, surveying each with careful scrutiny. Some seemed to confirm a suspicion growing in his mind, others gave him no clue.

He refrained from fingering the books in his present grimy state, yet he longed to do so. The flyleaf of any one of them might at once show him what he sought. At last his roving gaze came to a small, framed photograph hanging near the bureau. He turned on the electric bulb next it and scrutinized the picture, his haggard face growing whiter as he gazed. It was only the likeness of a plain little lady with a sweet face.

She was dressed in old-fashioned clothes, perhaps those of fifteen years before. The picture was the duplicate of one the tramp

had once carried among his personal belongings. Now he packed nothing with him—it was so much easier to travel light!

The face of the little lady showed a resemblance to the man who had brought him here. The tramp clenched his hands, and stood a long time in front of the picture.

“It’s him,” he muttered; “it’s him, sure!”

He sank down in a Morris chair beside the table, all thoughts of the present blotted out by the memories of twenty years crowding in upon him.

It was as though he had drunk the contents of the little black phial, and was facing the last moments of his life. A multitude of incidents flashed before his mental vision, and resentment took possession of him.

Why had Sandy stumbled over him and interfered with his plan just at the moment when he was waiting for the signal? What was this fool game which he and all those other men were playing anyway? Rebelliously the demon in him wrestled with his better nature. What was there to prevent his using the little phial now? This was as good a place as any. Better, perhaps—it would show all those fellows—!

Then came the restraining thought of the

apparent genuineness of the affair. His stupor lightened. He shook himself and looked about again.

After all, he had some sense of decency left, and he had no desire to pose in the lime-light. The passing out of a nameless vagrant in a vacant lot implicated no one; here it would be different. Then, over there was that little lady's face looking at him. He could not get away from it. Neither could he get away from the undefinable "something different" in Sandy's speech. He rose again and went toward the picture. Damn this world and its contradictions!

"Well, all right, then!" he said impatiently, and drawing the phial from his pocket was about to smash it on the first convenient surface, then checking the impulse he tucked it away behind a box on the bureau. There was no time for explanations just now. They would come later—perhaps—unless he decided to light out again.

He heard Sandy's step outside, his voice calling back to someone, his hand on the door-knob. Quickly stepping into the bath-room the tramp closed the door and turned on the water-faucet.

When Sandy entered the room, a pile of clothing on his arm, his guest was apparently

carrying out the preliminaries of the evening's program in a satisfactory manner. Sandy banged on the bath-room door.

"Hello! I've got you fitted all right, I think. Dinner will be ready in half an hour. Want a shave?"

The bath-room door opened a crack. "I suppose I'd better go the whole game," replied the tramp's voice unsteadily. "I'll be out of here in ten minutes."

Sandy dropped the bunch of clothing on the bed and went reflectively to the bureau. The shave suggestion had slipped out unexpectedly. Should he risk his razor in the hands of a strange man? Oh, well, what was the diff.? By the way, where *was* his razor? Pushing the articles about on his bureau in his impetuous search, he toppled the little black phial over into view. Sandy picked it up and examined it curiously under the electric light which he now remembered he had not turned on himself.

Laudanum! What was it doing here on his bureau? His tramp had brought it in, of course. Why, the devil, hadn't he ordered all these fellows searched before they came in! Suppose a revolution took place and all the unsuspecting hosts were murdered in various choice ways!

Sandy's eyes glittered excitedly. He rather liked the idea. It would stir things up a bit, and be a fine ad. for the Club. He carefully pocketed the phial, however.

"We won't have the poisoning until after dinner anyway, my fine gink!" he thought. Then the razor turning up he made a few preparations and left the room. The phial in his pocket was not comfortable; it disturbed him.

What should he do with the damned thing? If only he had a chosen enemy there confronting him he would ram it down his throat! Sandy had a variety of mental methods for uniquely destroying his enemies. Swiftly following this thought came another coupled with a vision of two serious eyes set in a beloved face. A certain blue-eyed lady who sometimes honored the Club with her presence was never far from his thoughts at any time. On occasions such as this she had a way of insinuating herself between his choicest plans and their accomplishment. The eyes could laugh approval; just now they were reproachful—he almost heard her voice saying—

He looked hurriedly about. A hall window opening on a light-well caught his eye. With more cheerful thoughts concerning his enemies running a merry chase through his

mind, he opened the window and dropped the phial. Leaning out he saw it smash on the pavement five stories below.

"So much for that!" he nodded conclusively, and continued on his way, undisturbed, to the dining-room where some final details awaited his attention.

Shortly after seven o'clock the dinner, now famous in club annals, was fully under way. The tables were arranged, banquet-fashion, in two long rows, with a speaker's table running crosswise at one end. The decorations were simple and to the point. Small silk flags of many nations alternated with bunches of dried grasses at intervals down the center of each long white cloth, and at every place was laid a corn-cob pipe with the necessary filling.

Sandy, under a multiplicity of titles, as leader of the feast, naturally occupied the central seat of honor, and up and down the lines club members and guests were alternately ranged. At Sandy's right hand sat a man at whom general attention and curiosity were directed. Each member had been more or less absorbed, up to the present, in his own hobo. Few had been serenely manageable. Only the members who had entered with Sandy had any remembrance of what his tramp had been like. Now the universal impression was that

Sandy had fooled them. There was certainly nothing of the "hobo" about the man who occupied the "guest of honor's" seat. A bath, a shave, and a good, well-brushed suit of Dan's were not the only factors in making the difference apparent between him and the other guests. There was something else, difficult of definition, which made him one with the best of his hosts. Sandy observed him with ever-increasing wonder. On the tramp's side all curiosity had subsided. He seemed sure of his ground, and in some inscrutable way, instead of Sandy's taking his hobo in tow and managing him according to preconceived methods, the former found himself deferring to and being influenced by a guest on his own level.

It was discovered that the man had traveled widely. There were not many occupations he had not tried; not many countries he had not visited.

He talked well, though spasmodically. Plainly he was exhausted and out of health. A general forced hilarity at the commencement of dinner soon became genuine as good food and fellowship warmed the inner man.

The tongues of many nations were loosed, and a curious lingo swung up and down the tables. "Dutch" and "Dago" predominated,

with American slang a close second. In a few quarters correct English was attempted but it was quickly frowned down and hooted out by club men. Sandy's man dropped from one lingo into another with surprising facility. He ate with his knife and fork as though he were accustomed to them. He was not bewildered by the various dishes offered him. He knew the significance of a finger-bowl. All these things were distinctly noticeable among a crowd of guests who bolted, shoveled, and in several other laborious and ungainly methods conveyed food into their persons.

Finally, rapacious hunger being satisfied, a comfortable relaxation prevailed. Among the club men a fair percentage had been able to dine, although many had been so occupied supplying the needs of their guests that there had been little time, to say nothing of food, for themselves.

A few had subsisted merely upon the wonder experienced in watching the disappearance of a marvelous amount of provender. Among these last was Sandy. Never a hearty eater himself, he watched with fascinated horror the gastronomic feats of his left-hand neighbor, the big Swede. At last even he seemed surfeited, and a general filling and lighting of pipes ensued.

The sense of peace attending this occupation was rudely disturbed by the tempestuous return of Dan and Carlton. Utterly frustrated in their search for stolen goods by the elusive Italian, they returned to vent their wrath in the bosom of their club home, only to find popular attention directed elsewhere. A supremely satisfied, after-dinner attitude prevailed, and no one expressed much sympathy for the loss of a revolver and a few bits of jewelry. When it was learned that notice of the theft had been given at police headquarters after the two men had followed several wrong clues over many miles, the mild curiosity of everyone was fully appeased.

"All right, you fellows; now dry up!" commanded Sandy, and the attention of the company, with one accord, veered toward their leader. What was to come next? Sandy would know. Apparently something was expected of him. He laid aside his corn-cob and rose to the occasion. Chairs shifted and scraped. Numerous mutterings were heard.

"Go to it, old man!"—"Want an interpreter?"—"Talk Esperanto."—"Hear, hear!"—were a few of the many admonitions to which Sandy lent an unperturbed ear.

"Gentlemen," he began, then stopped and cleared his throat, running his gaze swiftly

along the rows of expectant faces. "No, I take that back. I give you a better title—Tramps!"

Several hoboes frowned and clenched their fists, but the majority smiled in lazy good humor.

"For what are we all but tramps along the road of life?" asked Sandy. "Some walk a little faster than others, that's all. Now my purpose is not to make a speech. Speech-making is a pernicious habit indulged in by gentlemen and politicians, and should be counted a capital offence. I therefore propose to spend the time otherwise devoted to speech-making in a general swapping of experiences. Start the ball rolling, Dan. Tell us about that tramp of yours through the Bingo Mountains."

Thus adjured, Dan launched forth into a thrilling narration of personal adventures embellished here and there with highly ornate bits of fiction. Numerous other discourses by tramps real and impersonated followed this, until excitement waxed high, and experience-swapping threatened to become Bedlam.

Sandy's guest remained extremely quiet. He puffed at his pipe, lost apparently in meditation, yet Sandy felt his keen attentiveness

through all the clamor of tongues, and finally, meeting his glance, his hobo said quietly:

"I'll give them a bit of my experience." He rose to his feet. He looked out over the crowd, and magically it came to order held by curiosity concerning the strange man.

"Fellow-Tramps," he began, "you have all been jesting here about life. You have related thrilling adventures in which you have tossed your lives about in every sort of hazard, and what you call good luck has pulled you through every time. You depended on chance, every one of you, but some day it will fail you. Now I have always believed in luck, too. You've none of you spoken of the many fights you must have had with death. You have all talked only of life, and your own cleverness in outwitting circumstances, or your neighbors. Now I am going to tell you about some of my own escapes from death."

He went on, his voice growing stronger as he talked. He told of a rescue from shipwreck—he related incidents in a starvation fight on the desert—he dwelt upon a desperate struggle with Indians in a border town. "But these fights," he continued, "were as nothing compared to the constant warfare some of us wage against the death of our own souls. Fellow-Tramps," he looked from one to another

of the transfixed club members, he was talking over the heads of the real tramps; "we don't always know what we are doing when we talk about 'luck,' and 'chance.' When you planned this dinner you did it for a good bit of fun for yourselves. You didn't know what you were doing any more than I knew that I should be standing here in decent clothes talking to you." He hesitated. "I'm getting away off my subject, and will soon be laying myself open to conviction for a 'capital offence!' " A quizzical glance at Sandy pointed this last sentence, and drew a quick: "Hear! Hear!" from that individual. The strange guest continued:

"It's too big a subject, that soul-fight I spoke of. I want only to tell you of my last one in which 'luck' interfered. Perhaps many of you did not hear the city whistles this afternoon. Only those who are vitally interested hear them as a rule." The man's voice grew husky, unsteady. He turned and fixed his gaze upon Sandy. "I heard them. I was waiting for them—so were thousands of others. But I wonder how many of those who waited were intending to quit work for good when the signal sounded!"

One nervous hand clutched the back of his

chair, his voice grew more unsteady. Sandy watched him with increasing wonder and fascination, vague premonitions of something strange, yet familiar.

"Three times before I've tried to quit this job of living," continued the faltering voice. "But each time I was too big a coward. To-day my mind was made up. I was waiting for the signal.—Only one-half minute was left for your 'luck' to work in. What happened?—This—this man you call 'Sandy' stumbled, yes, literally stumbled over me, and—and—told me to 'come along with him!' That I was 'invited to dinner.' That's all, Fellow-Tramps—you talk about your 'luck,' and make game of it, but I—tell—you—"

His voice broke completely, and Sandy, abhorrent of a "scene," rose hurriedly.

The stranger rallied again. "I'll go upstairs now—if—"

"Of course! Come right along!" exclaimed Sandy, in haste to break the breathless spell which had fallen over the assemblage.

As the two left the room a clatter of tongues burst forth, and countless surmises, suggestions, and questions were promulgated, ready to spring upon the luckless Sandy when he should return; but that perturbed person did not soon come back.

In the bedroom his guest sat for several minutes in the Morris chair. He refused the offer of whiskey, or any other restorative, and lay back, white and still, with closed eyes. Sandy stood by, restless, desirous of doing something—any old thing!

A helpless feeling, entirely foreign to his usual confidence, took possession of him. He knew how he *ought* to feel, good Lord, yes! It was an infernal nuisance, having his hobo fool him like this. He ought to feel all cut up about it and curse him up and down, but somehow, he didn't.

That was what troubled Sandy. He *was* feeling all cut up but in quite another way. He was fighting against it. He didn't like the feeling in his throat, and a lot of annoying emotions swayed him.

His hobo opened his eyes. "Forgive me, Sandy," he said, "for bringing a skeleton to your feast. I couldn't help it. Something greater than you and me forced me on."

He rose and went to the bureau, facing the photograph. The plain little lady looked out at him serenely. She seemed to smile. Sandy followed, hypnotized. He knew then what was coming.

"If Mother could speak," began the other, "she'd call me—"

"Donald!" finished Sandy.

"Yes—I'm Donald.—The doctors gave me just so long to live, unless I could get the right climate and treatment, so I thought I'd better quit before I got too bad.—I'll go away tomorrow, if you like. I'd be only a trouble to you. I mightn't stay 'reformed' very long!" He smiled wanly. "I never could, you know. No doubt you've heard that from relatives!"

Sandy grasped his hobo's hand. "To hell with reform—*and relatives!*" he cried.

HIS FIRST ABDUCTION

Affairs at the Burtons' were approaching a crisis, and Sandy was worried. As he walked up the hill toward the shoddy apartment-house which sheltered this so-called "family" of man, woman, and two young girls, Sandy held himself a weak fool for having been drawn into this nauseating domestic maelstrom.

There was much about it which he did not understand. Surmises only created suspicion of an ugly nature. Sandy's brain, accustomed to obey his orders, flew off on a tangent, and refused to look sanely at the matter.

It was all Prescott's fault anyway. His friend, Prescott, had met Maylita Burton at a café dance a short time before his last sailing, and had mentioned her to Sandy as "a promising kid who would bear watching;" and that somebody should "give her a tip to cut out the night life and go back to school."

Then Prescott had gone about his business of officering his ship, leaving Sandy's new-

born curiosity to feed upon nothing more substantial than a few words exchanged with the girl, following an introduction one evening, and an inherent desire, fostered by years of newspaper work, to follow up a clue.

Then, one day he had passed Maylita on Powell street. She had given him a gay little nod with all the western assurance of seventeen. Her idiotic hat, with its downward tilt toward her upturned, freckled nose, aided the nod. Since then the acquaintance had passed through several gradations. Now he was on his way up the hill, a book under his arm, carrying culture to Maylita.

"Lucky kid, she hasn't been much to school!" he mused, nursing his old-time prejudice against established methods of education.

Maylita agreed with him on this subject. How she had escaped an enforced amount of schooling was a mystery, unless a certain precocity which passed for maturity had hoodwinked the census-takers. Maylita had been a "young lady," with all its advantages of long skirts, turned-up hair and flaunting feathers, since she was fourteen.

Recently something seemed to trouble her. She had assumed a strangely defensive attitude. The young-girl sauciness was hardening a trifle into the boldness of the street

promenader. Sandy's thoughts shifted to the mother of this girl, then to the father. Was he her father? Why should his brain ask the question? Yet it did. By the time Sandy reached the Burtons' front door and rang the bell it held a tangle of questions and surmises.

He intended leaving the book for Maylita with anyone who answered the summons. Vague, shuffling sounds from within assured him that his ring had been heard. He waited. Sandy was not a patient man, but in consideration for a woman passing on the sidewalk below, he swore softly. He heard an upper window thrown open and something muttered about an "agent." Then the window slammed down again.

Once more he rang, this time continuously, a look of grim humor testifying to his enjoyment of the pastime, until the door slowly moved, and a portion of Mrs. Burton appeared in a ten-inch aperture. One surmised that the rest of her was held together by the hand clutching a gaudy *négligée*.

"I don't want any—" she began tartly.

Sandy urbanely cut short her speech. "How do you do, Mrs. Burton?"

The aperture widened and the atmosphere cleared. Mrs. Burton's society manner, which she had left on her dressing-table, slipped

down the stairway with miraculous swiftness and enveloped the lady. She laughed affectedly.

"That's one on me! You must really pardon me—I am so annoyed by—er—Mr.—" She stopped, puzzled.

Sandy did not enlighten her as to his name. "Kindly give this to Miss Maylita," he requested, tendering the book. "It's a story she and I have been talking about."

Mrs. Burton assumed an air of mystery. "Maylita ain't home, neither's Claribel," she whispered. "I wish you'd come in awhile. I'm in great trouble and I must talk to someone."

Sandy's first impulse was to turn and rush headlong down the steps and away; his second tempted him with the promise of a good story.

To gain time he looked dubiously at his watch, which, with its daily habit, had stopped.

"I have half an hour to spare," he admitted gruffly, and followed Mrs. Burton into the tiny entrance hall and thence into a box-like sitting-room.

The lady was rapidly inventing an appropriate tale while she motioned Sandy toward a brilliantly upholstered patent-rocker, and seated herself with studied negligence in the

"cosy-corner," over which a standard lamp presided. Sandy's imagination pictured the alluring glow this lamp was designed to shed during the evening hours.

He could not know that the story now issuing from the speaker's lips was an inspiration of the moment, yet he suspected it, and listened warily. His surmises when coming up the street recurred to him, and they fitted each new statement exactly. He believed nothing Mrs. Burton told him. His faith in his own theories grew strong. The details of her recital he forgot almost as soon as uttered, but the substance added layer upon layer to the structure of his own conviction.

Here was a household, founded, not for the integrity or uplift of the human race, but for its downfall. The "cruelty" and "infidelity" of a husband he defined as the straining chains of a temporary relationship. The "undutifulness" of daughters he put down as the natural waywardness of two pretty, untrained girls. Looking at their mother, suddenly and intimately thrown under his observation, Sandy saw the appropriateness of both these adjectives.

Another suspicion assailed him—*Was she their mother?* Yes, she must, at any rate, be Maylita's. Both had the same trick of the

eyes, although that might be due to constant association. He could not definitely place the elder girl, but she was beside the point; his concern was Maylita.

Mrs. Burton's smooth, insinuating tones, contrasting oddly with her lack of grammar, continued:

"Maylita's her pa's favorite, and I says to him the other night, 'you ain't got no call to make a difference between the two,' but he says," a hard glint came into the woman's eyes, "'she's so pretty I can't help it.'"

Here Sandy's structure of surmises grew rapidly. Maylita was not Mr. Burton's daughter and her mother was jealous of the girl.

Her daughters had not been brought up to work, he was told. Their father had met with reverses. Everyone knew what this last year had been in a business way. Couldn't he see how she was placed with two young, attractive girls on her hands, so difficult to manage—discord and jealousy between her husband and herself?—In fact, a man of mature judgment like Mr.—er—she never *could* remember names! might be of so much assistance, especially in Maylita's case. Maylita had spoken of him often lately. In fact—she sus-

pected—oh, well, she mustn't "butt in," she supposed!

This final insinuation, flung at Sandy with the suddenness of a bomb, brought him to his feet. He consulted his silent watch. His hostess, seeing her advantage slipping from her, grasped for some new straw, and caught it in the sound of quick footsteps coming up from the street, and the banging of the outer door.

"Here's Maylita now," she said, as the girl with the exaggerated enthusiasm of the present day, ran into the room.

Her genuine surprise was evident at the sight of her mother's visitor.

"Hello!" exclaimed Maylita airily.

"Hello, yourself!" responded Sandy. "Been shopping?"

"Sure! On thirty cents. Can you beat it?"

Sandy's grim surmise about the girl's position wavered as he contemplated her fresh gaiety. Surely she could not be deliberately concerned in any conspiracy.

"I came to bring you the book we were discussing," he said. "Let me know when you have finished it, and I'll bring you another."

"Oh, ain't you just grand!" she cried de-

lightly. "Clare's so jealous she can't see straight."

"I'll bring her one too," suggested Sandy simply.

"I guess *nit!*" was the indignant response. "You're *my* find."

Bewildered Sandy winced at the definiteness of this assertion. The drawn-out half-hour again suggested itself.

"I was just going," he said, and with an abrupt "good-bye" he left mother and daughter to share their astonishment with each other.

Several days passed. Then, early one evening Sandy received an agitated telephone message. Maylita's voice urged him to meet her "right away" about something important. She was starting that moment down the hill. Sandy's ire rose. No woman should say "right away" to him! He hung up the receiver without giving a definite answer. Immediately an organ within him which he firmly believed to be callous asserted itself. He pottered about in his tiny sitting-room, carefully filled his pipe, and lighted it. Each puff only accentuated the threatening of that callous organ in his chest, till, hang it all! He caught up his hat and hastened out.

"What does the darned kid want now?" he grumbled, as he strode up the street.

Maylita, true to her word, had started "right away," never doubting the willingness of her "find" to obey her behest. She met him three-quarters of the way.

"I hate 'em all up there!" she began excitedly. "On the low down, I'm going to run away!"

"Come off, now, come off," advised Sandy, twitching her sleeve, presumably bringing her down from an airship flight. "What's the trouble, eh?"

"Gee, it makes me sick! That man's the limit."

"What man?"

"That—" she hesitated, "my f—father."

Sandy caught her elbow firmly, turned her round a corner, and walked her determinedly forward.

"Now, see here, I want the truth about this, Maylita! I can't help you in the slightest until I know the facts. Why do you call your father 'that man?' " The girl began to stammer again. "Is he your father?—I don't believe he is."

"How did you know?"

"It didn't take much perception. Where's your own father?"

"I don't know," said Maylita inconsequentially. "I never heard much about *him*. This guy's been hanging around for the last three years, and he's getting to be a pest, see?"

Sandy did "see," and a street light helped by giving him a glimpse of the girl's honest eyes, clear and unfaltering, gazing into his.

Her treble voice rattled on. "I've had a lot of 'fathers.' That's all right when you're a kid. Kids don't bother much about things if they've got plenty of food and clothes. But it's the limit when you begin to *see* things—like in that book you just gave me."

"Serves me right!" growled Sandy, feeling his own responsibility growing. "I never did believe in education."

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing! I was merely talking to myself."

He frequently addressed strange remarks to himself while conversing with Maylita. She was accustomed to this habit, and put it down as one of the peculiarities of middle-age.

"I'm going to quit now," she continued. "I'm going to light out, *skidoo*, *twenty-thr-r-ree*, and I knew you'd help me!"

The unfortunate Sandy, his hand gripping her thin little elbow, marched firmly on.

"Ouch!" complained Maylita. "When

you're done with my arm I'd like it back, kid!"

With amazement Sandy regarded this slender, snub-nosed, starry-eyed bit of femininity so nonchalantly treading the brink of a frightful chasm.

He laughed aloud. "You're a game chicken. If I do help you, you must do as I say, you know. When do you wish to run away, and what do you propose doing?"

"I'll get away first," she announced calmly.

"It isn't so easy to run away as you think. If you pack up and walk out you'll be readily traced. You have nowhere to go."

"That's just what I wanted to talk to you about. Ma won't be itching to find me, but my dear 'pa' will!"

More and more heavily the unwelcome situation pressed upon Sandy, but he had never been known willingly to disappoint a "kid."

"Go home now and hold your own for a few more days. You can do it. I'll do some thinking. Darn you, I'll come up to the house in a day or so, and size up the situation myself! We'll see what can be done."

"All right," she assented. "I know you'll think of something."

They turned another corner and found

themselves within a few doors of her apartment.

"Come in now," she suggested.

"No, not now. I must think."

"Just as you say, but don't you forget!"

"I always remember," answered Sandy, and with him, although Maylita did not know it, this was a binding oath.

Airily she tossed a kiss as she ran up the steps, leaving Sandy to walk soberly down the hill, alternately cursing and marvelling at the pranks of fate which had deliberately given into his keeping, to make or mar, this irresponsible fragment of human life.

When he strolled up the hill the following evening with another book in his pocket for Maylita, he had made no definite plans. His mind was open to receive the impressions which a call on the assembled family would give. To his dismay he found a half-dozen guests being entertained by an apparently harmonious domestic group. Preparations for a card game were under way, as a box of poker chips and other signs testified.

The nonchalant object of his visit scarcely noticed him, so absorbed was she with the attentions of a tall, powerful-looking youth whom Sandy recognized as one of the fastest

men about town. Mr. Burton greeted Sandy with scant cordiality, but Mrs. Burton alleviated the effect of this by drawing him aside with a confidential smile. The standard lamp shed a rosy glow over the "cosy-corner" tonight. She seated herself there but Sandy evinced no desire to be lured into a flirtation with Mrs. Burton. He stood uncompromisingly in front of her and spoke solemnly of the weather—of its effect upon the crops. Then taking the book from his pocket he glanced toward Maylita.

Mrs. Burton held up her hand chidingly. "Don't—don't disturb her now, you naughty man! She's having the time of her life." She laughed, and Sandy hated her for the look she bestowed on her young daughter.

"Give the girl a chance," she added.

No more words were needed; one read the woman's purpose in every glance and expression. In the interval Sandy decided upon his method of campaign. He would beat this woman at her little game if it took six months! His expression betrayed nothing. He became more genial, and continued to talk about the weather.

Craftily watching for his chance, he soon deserted the lady in the "cosy-corner" and

went to Maylita. He nodded greeting to the man at her side.

"How are you, Blaine? Well, Miss Maylita, how's the library coming on?"

She smiled languidly. Elderly men and their books were of small consequence tonight.

"Oh, all right, I guess! I ain't finished the last one yet. It's too deep for *me*!" She tapped her pretty forehead where the wayward hair fell loosely. "Nobody home!"

Blaine smiled approvingly. "That's right! Don't let's have any of this 'new woman' stuff in ours. Miss Maylita's too pretty to worry over books."

She simpered delightedly. Sandy set his teeth. Determined lines showed about his mouth. His tone was suave.

"I think this one will interest you. It's a story of the mountains."

Good fortune favored Sandy at that moment. A girl who with jealous eyes had been watching Maylita and her admirer suddenly took advantage of Sandy's making a third and broke into the group, claiming Blaine's attention. For the moment Blaine was helpless against the intruder's effusive greeting.

Meanwhile Sandy rapidly "made hay." Opening the book he insisted upon Maylita's

looking at it. Under cover of this on a bit of paper he wrote hurriedly:

"I have decided what to do. Come down the hill tomorrow at four. Bring a clean shirtwaist with you. No fooling, kid. I'm on the square."

He slipped this into her hand. "Good-night, Maylita; sorry I can't stay longer," and was gone.

Promptly at four o'clock the next afternoon a much-puzzled Maylita met him. Sandy had been right in his belief that curiosity, if nothing else, would bring her.

"What's this fer?" was her first enquiry, indicating the small parcel she carried, containing presumably, the clean shirtwaist.

During their tramp up and down the city streets Sandy explained. For an hour they walked and argued. Up Pine street they went, and down Bush; up Sutter and down Post. It was a different girl now with whom Sandy had to deal, a girl dazzled by the attentions of a new admirer, different from any previous one. Sandy was a "find" of another sort. He was an interesting puzzle, not a possible "beau." Sandy realized that it was now or never with her. He would take no refusal. Acting on her expressed wish to leave home he

insisted that with his help she should carry it out. So they argued.

"It will take time, Maylita, to find a place for you, and to decide what you are eventually to do. If you leave home at once with bag and baggage they'll see you go, and will soon trace you. What I want you to do is this. During the next few days smuggle down to me in packages all the clothes and truck you think you'll need. I'll keep them in my room. Just as soon as we get everything together we'll pack you up in a couple of my suitcases or bags—or—anything!" Sandy's enthusiasm increased with each new idea. "Then I'll take you across the bay to some friends of mine. I'm abducting you, Maylita, don't you see?" he wound up gleefully.

Her face expressed anything but the expected pleasure at this announcement. He continued.

"My friends will keep you until we find work for you. Then when you are at work, and independent—" he snapped his fingers—"no relatives in the world can get you back!"

Maylita grew rather pleased with this idea. "All right," she finally agreed. "I get you. I guess it's what I ought to do."

"Good girl! Slip out tomorrow at ten and four. I'll be waiting to take your bundles.

Bring all you can without causing any suspicion."

"Oh, they don't notice what I'm up to much of the time! Ma and Claribel have their own troubles."

"Is Claribel your sister?"

"I don't know. I always thought she was, but she's been away a lot. Maybe she's a fakir too, eh?"

"Let's give her the benefit of the doubt," suggested Sandy.

"She needs it!" charitably conceded Maylita.

The next few days were exciting ones for the hero of this abduction case. His club saw him not. "What's become of Sandy?" various clubmembers enquired. No one knew. No one saw him cross the bay at an unusual hour; neither did anyone know of his suddenly developed interest in advertisement columns, nor of his making numerous calls upon people who might lend their aid in this conspiracy without being told that it was one.

At ten and four o'clock each day a jaunty little figure came down the hill, sometimes happily expectant, sometimes defiant, but never quite daring to defeat her abductor's plans. Curiosity continued to do its work.

Sandy questioned her once or twice about

what was taking place at home. Mr. Blaine had called once again. It was the morning after this that Maylita was defiant, and Sandy called her a "little fool."

Then the day arrived when a sober-faced Maylita, half-frightened, sat in Sandy's sitting-room for the first time and surveyed her numerous parcels carefully stacked in a corner. Sandy had been calculating their dimensions, and several valises stood ready.

"Come, Maylita, it's up to you. Chuck them in and we'll get the next boat across."

Then the unexpected happened. "I don't want to go," whined Maylita. "Say, it'll be awful lonesome over there. I'd rather stay here."

"Stop that!" commanded Sandy. "Do you know what you're talking about, you blooming kid?"

"Yes, I know!" defiantly. "But what's the use? I guess you're a pretty kind guy. I don't know how to do no work to earn my living, and what's the use, anyhow? Claribel says—"

"Just cut out the Claribel stuff and listen to me. Do you remember what you told me last week when you decided to 'light out?'"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Well, then, that was *you* talking, not this

silly little goose here on my couch. That was you, your real self, that girl, and she can do anything she wants to do because *she's* big and strong!"

"I ain't big and strong," sobbed Maylita, throwing herself face downward on the couch.

Then for a few minutes the devil entered Sandy's soul.

Sandy's name for him was "the other fellow," and he loathed him, but he loathed himself more after having listened to his prompting.

No, Maylita was not "big and strong," she was small and frail, agreed the devil.

"But her potentialities are great," argued Sandy. "With me lies the making of her life."

"What have you to do with her future? There she is!" urged the devil. "Her mother practically gave her to you that day last week. The present is yours. Why is it for you to shoulder the responsibility any more than for any other man?"

Sandy stood rigid, his hands clenched. To make or mar? There was a middle course—to turn her out again and let her drift. It had been through no wish of his that he had become this girl's guardian.

Thus Maylita's fate hung upon the out-

come of a struggle between Sandy and "the other fellow."

Meanwhile she lay on the couch sobbing tumultuously. Perhaps the sobs turned the scales for her. They were too much like those of a tired, excited child.

Suddenly the devil slunk away, beaten, and a gruff, profane Sandy stood, determined and alone.

He strode to the couch and shook the prostrate Maylita.

"Damn you!" he shouted. "Quit that! Get up and pack your clothes. I'm going outside. I'll be back here in *ten minutes*, do you hear? I give you just that to be ready."

He was gone, but his departure was gladdened by a glimpse of the girl hurriedly sopping her tears with a ball of a handkerchief, and commencing to cram her belongings into the waiting receptacles.

The trip across the bay was silent and gloomy. Neither could have told whether the sun shone. Even the seagulls respected their mood and swooped in wide circles away from them.

It was only after Sandy had returned to his apartment, and was philosophically gathering up the scattered bits of string and

paper, that he realized with a sense of triumph that his first abduction had been successfully accomplished.

All this happened several years ago. Sandy's crime was never discovered; he still walks the earth unpunished.

One evening last week he dined with Maylita at her home across the bay. She is no longer "lonesome," for in her home live also her husband, and year-old son.

Sandy passed a pleasant evening there. After he had said good-night, the husband followed him to the door, while the young wife answered the cry of the tiny boy.

"I'm glad to see you so well fixed," said Sandy, making conversation as he shook himself into his much-worn overcoat.

"I tell you, it's great," responded the young man. "That little girl is as square as they make 'em; but then you know what she is. Maylita says she's known you a long time. It's what we all need, you bet!—a good woman to keep us straight!"

And Sandy, smiling wisely, agreed with him.

THE HUMAN LOTTERY

Sandy despised Maisie with all the strength of his impetuous nature, yet with the exception of two well-known facts, he knew nothing about her. She wore a bold, green feather on an otherwise inconspicuous hat, and she sold lottery tickets in all the vilest dens along the water front.

Frequently he questioned his prejudice. What was the woman or her occupation to him? Then the green feather would flaunt its hideousness in front of his harmony-loving eyes, the strident tones of her voice would jar once again upon his ear-drums, and with a shudder he would hasten out of sight and hearing.

An evening came when he voiced his emotional opinions to his friend, Prescott. Every three months Philip Prescott's steamer came into port, and Prescott, a clean-cut, young second officer, leaving his gaily bedecked cabin with his "mascot" and other keepsakes, "bunked" with Sandy during the few nights on shore.

Maisie brushed against them as they were about to enter the ferry building on their way to dine with a suburban friend.

"There's a woman who ought to be run off the earth!" grumbled Sandy.

Prescott, shifting his gaze sideways as he dropped his ticket into the gateman's box, glimpsed the woman's back in retreat.

"Why, that's Maisie!"

"Is it, indeed?" gibed Sandy with mild surprise. "You seem to be on familiar terms with the lady."

"She's not a bad sort," answered Prescott. "She comes on board every trip in, and there's not a man on the ship who hasn't a good word for Maisie."

Sandy concealed his increased surprise. "Well, I hate her," he stated emphatically. The subject continued to irritate him however, and half way across the bay he jerked it forth again. "She's had a young girl around with her recently; teaching *her* the tricks of the trade, I suppose!"

"Yes, that's Alice."

"Alice?" Sandy was now openly curious.

"Yes — young Englishwoman," volunteered Prescott. "It seems she landed here in San Francisco last year with a dead husband, and a kid expected."

Interest gleamed in Sandy's eyes, but a casual "humph" was all he vouchsafed. It was his opinion that Prescott showed undue familiarity with the private history of these women.

"The man died on the train near Sacramento," continued his friend, unconscious of the impression he was creating. "Maisie ran across the girl in the waiting-room just after the train got in. She was having some stiff time, I can tell you, with a lot of dunderheaded officials who were treating the affair as a capital offence against the comfort of passengers for a woman carelessly to allow her husband to die on the train."

"Some women *are* like that!" commented Sandy, siding with the officials.

"Don't be a chump, Sandy. I'm giving you the straight dope. Maisie has been a good friend to Alice; she's had her in tow ever since."

"Well, I'm sorry for Alice. I wish she had a better friend! Of all the—"

Just then the boat bumped into the ferry slip, cutting in two any further invectives intended for Maisie, and after the two men had boarded the Oakland train the subject was not resumed.

Meanwhile the green feather bobbed in and out among the countless varieties of millinery hurrying to catch the outbound boats. Gradually in the mist its jauntiness became reduced to damp, pathetic wisps clinging to their wearer's indescribable hair.

The evening was a depressing one following a weary day. Maisie's heart was not in her work; her tongue seemed to have lost its power of persuasion. She usually knew "how to talk to 'em, sure she did!" When dealing with "swells" she knew just the wink and the sly insinuations to make use of which drew them aside and exchanged bits of pasteboard for good, hard coin in a minute's time, always out of sight of the nearest "cop."

Although the majority of the officers on the beat knew Maisie well by sight and had a pleasant speaking acquaintance with her, and although each had his well-founded suspicion as to her occupation, suspicion had never been substantiated by fact. Facts are troublesome affairs often causing endless deviations from one's regular line of duty, so there existed a tacit agreement allowing Maisie to pursue her own untrammelled way.

Across the Embarcadero she went hoping for better success among her "regulars" in the numerous dens which face the ferry docks.

In these she was quite at home. Here insinuations and hoodwinking were seldom needed.

"Hello, here's the old gal a-comin'!" joshed the bleary-eyed individual who ran a choice "beanery" into which many a young sailor lurched when he came ashore to "blow in" his wages in the few hours allowed for riotous living. These young sailors were meat and drink to Maisie.

"Sure, it's much better fer thim ter take a uncertain chanst wid me, thin a sure drunk!" she sometimes said.

Often her stout fist was called into requisition when her ready tongue failed to settle some matter of too much familiarity on their part.

"Close yer face, Maginnis," she now casually remarked to the bleary-eyed joshier. "Has Kennedy come in yet?"

"You bet, an' gone out again."

"Whyn't ye hold 'im here, ye darn fool, till Oi come?"

"*Me* hold 'im! Guess yer ain't seen 'is new mash. I tell yer what!" The bleary eyes of Maginnis roved heavenward in an ecstatic attempt to express something for which mere words were inadequate.

"A good thing too! Ye needn't think Oi'm

after wantin' ter stop 'im. He kin jist kape 'is dirty paws offen my Alice!"

"How is the purty miss?" questioned Maginnis. "I ain't seen 'er this week."

"No, nor ye won't, Tom Maginnis. Oi've had enough o' the loikes o' ye fer a honest girl. She'll come no more aroun' here."

A water-front policeman strolled in and nodded pleasantly.

Without a change of tone, owing to long practice, Maisie continued. "An' jist tell Kennedy Oi've got those new kind o' shoe-strings he loikes, an' maybe he'd want some little trifle fer 'is girl."

"Shoe-strings, is it?" Maginnis laughed derisively. "All right, I'll tell 'im!"

"Cold night, Maisie," remarked the officer, as she passed out into the fog.

"It is that," she answered.

Standing still a moment in the jostling, cosmopolitan throng she looked southward along the glittering line of lights streaming from open doorways, each one attracting its quota of unresisting humanity.

Trade might be good tonight. The fog would drive many indoors to remain through the evening, and it required only a drink or two in a convivial atmosphere to loosen the average man's purse strings.

An unusual distaste of it all possessed Maisie.

"Aw, what's the use?" she exclaimed to a hulking sailor stumbling over the curb. "Oi'm goin' home."

The man leered. "Well, go on, old gal. What's hinderin' yer?"

Turning northward, Maisie trudged for many blocks until ferry-boat whistles, car bells, and all the other city noises dropped away below her in the distance. Still, the feeling of distaste, mingled with a vague sense of injustice, pursued her. Over and over again the sound of a man's voice rang in her ears, the voice of a man whom she knew well by sight but whom she had not for a long time accosted. "There's a woman who ought to be run off the earth," reiterated this voice until the hard sidewalks gave back the words in rhythm under her weary feet, humming them out of the swathing fog.

After half an hour's walk she came to the foot of a flight of rickety steps. Climbing these she paused to take breath. Perched on the side of a steep hill with others of its kind was a shabby little cottage toward which she turned with a sigh of relief. From the narrow front walk she peered through a slit in one of the old green shutters. A feeble light

was visible. Yes,—there they were, those who composed her bit of home.

One glance showed that something had occurred to disturb the usual routine. A girl of ten had thrown aside her school-books and was trying to comfort a fair-haired young woman whose pale, refined face looked markedly out of place in its poor surroundings. A boy of five sat at a shaky old table busily occupied with some kindergarten work. Occasionally he glanced up with a troubled look. His pudgy face bore a ludicrous resemblance to the one peering through the shutter. Something should be done, he knew, in the way of offering comfort, yet he felt his extreme youth an obstacle, so he pursued his occupation in stolid silence.

“Don’t cry, Alice, dearie,” the little girl was saying. “Ma’ll be in soon, then you can tell her all about it.”

Alice leaned her head against the dark one of her little consoler. “Your mother is so good to me, Maggie. I’ve been a lot of trouble to her.”

Then Maisie withdrew her eye from the slit and tramped across the narrow porch and entered.

“Here she is!” cried Maggie.

Little Bob recklessly cast aside his strips

of many-colored paper, leaped up and swung joyously on his mother's arm.

"Spalpeen!" said Maisie, but her tone and smile conveyed all he wished to her son, and he returned to his task with a satisfied sigh.

"Well, Alice, what's the matter? What ye doin' t'er, Mag?"

"Nothin', Ma. She won't tell me what's the matter. She was home here when I came in from school."

"She was, huh? We'll have ter see about that." Maisie glanced keenly at the face of the older girl. "Bring me my supper, Maggie; thin ye kin take Bobby an' run over ter Mis' Henderson's fer a bit."

"Oh, Ma, why must I?" implored Maggie, torn with disappointed curiosity.

"Oi don't want none o' yer lip, Mag. Ye kin do as Oi say."

"Yes'm."

"Bobby kin take 'is mats ter weave, an' ye kin do yer 'rithmetic jist as well over there as here. Give Mis' Henderson me love, an' ye needn't come back till Oi blow the horn."

It was irrevocable. Fate, in the shape of a ponderous form and a broad, homely face dealt thus with these two dependent little human beings. Forth into the fog they went

bearing colored paper and the 'rithmetic book to Mis' Henderson's.

"Poor children!" sighed Alice. "It's a shame to send them away."

"Don't ye be botherin'. They'll be better off there fer a bit. What's gone wrong, girl?"

"Eat your supper, please, Maisie." Alice roused herself with an effort and pushed the woman toward an uninviting heap of food on a tin plate which with a cup of coffee Maggie had placed on the table.

"How dreadful of me! I should have cooked you something fresh."

As she talked Alice relieved Maisie of the green feather with its accompanying shred of straw, and drew off her dingy brown jacket.

"Phew!" said Maisie with a sound between a puff and a sigh. "Oi'm not hungry. Oi'll jist pick it over a little."

While she ate, Maisie regarded Alice curiously, and soon pushed aside her plate.

"Let's come ter bizness. Did ye git let out?"

Alice nodded. "I—I let myself out. Oh, Maisie, it's the same old story! I thought it was going to be a good place. The work was just about right for me—not too hard,—and I thought he was going to be square. But this

afternoon—"her voice grew bitter—"he said he wanted to make a lady of me. Well, I knew what that meant, so I came home."

Maisie's expression grew menacing. "Oi'd loike ter be at 'im!" she muttered.

"I've never been anything but a trouble to you since the day you brought me home. Let me go, Maisie—nobody wants me in this world; even my baby was taken from me!"

"Hush, child, don't ye be talkin' truck! Did ye git a letter terday?"

"Yes." Alice produced the letter, a brief one, written in an English hand.

Maisie pored over it a moment with puzzled brows. "Ye moight as well tell me what it says. Oi can't mek head nor tail o' these sprawly words," she finally admitted.

Short as the letter was it contained the tragedy of one human being's life—possibly that of another.

In highly cultivated diction it set forth that in view of the recipient having married the writer's only son in total disregard of his parents' wishes, the said parents utterly refused to recognize the son's widow. The son had ceased to exist for them when he married her. She was less than nothing to them. As it had come to their knowledge, however, that she had brought an innocent child into the

world, they were bound in family honor, it being a boy, to take the child and bring him up in his English birthright. The writer was glad to state that the infant had arrived safely in the care of the trained nurse sent out for him, and was now thriving under proper nourishment and wise discipline. Despite the unfortunate beginning of his young life the writer trusted that in the child was the making of a loyal British subject.

No more communications were desired from his mother. The family wished to forget as far as possible that such a person had ever existed. Having so independently arranged the details of her own life in the past, she, no doubt, was highly competent to conduct her future in a satisfactory manner. Hoping that this would be the last time that the writer would be compelled to address her, she signed herself—*et cetera*—.

By adopting a monotonous tone Alice was able to read aloud the heartless mandate to the end. It repeated only what former letters had contained, but this one, in its hardness, crystallized her life's tragedy. Her husband dead—her child taken from her—her health a slender thing, unable to stand a full day's work—what was there left for Alice?

"He loved me so—he loved me so—and they cast me out!" she sobbed.

"There, there, child, there's no good iver comes o' cryin'! Sure there's enough mud aroun' now widout addin' ter it."

"I know, I know. But I'm so tired of try-ing. I can't help it."

"Ye cudn't try the Emporium again, cud ye? But, of course ye cudn't."

"I'm afraid not. I'm not so strong now as I was before baby came, when I had to quit work there. Let me go around with you, Maisie, and help you with your work. Couldn't I do that?"

"Ye moight—ye moight. But there's places my ugly old mug kin go where yours would be sorter out o' place."

"Oh, Maisie, don't! I love your dear face."

"Huh!" grunted Maisie, only partially convinced.

"You'll have to find new customers, while I can go to some of the old, can't I?"

"Oi'll see. Rest ternight, girлие, an' don't ye worry. Jist go out an' blow that horn fer the childern, will ye?"

Next moment the dismal wail of a fish-horn sounded from the front porch, a familiar call on the hill for Maggie and Bobby, soon

bringing them home, sleepy, but with examples done and mats woven for the morrow.

Through the long night hours Maisie lay awake. Out in the channel at regular intervals the fog-horn sounded its doleful warning to dependent vessels. Toward morning its solemn tones became a part of her fitful dreams.

"Wouldn't it be foine," she thought, with her rough philosophy, "if somebody'd blow a horn at us ivery toime we're goin' wrong, an' tell us what ter do!"

Maisie never stopped to worry over her own troubles during the day, but often they caught her, too weary for sleep, in the middle of the night, and forced her attention; usually, as now, in connection with someone else.

Could she give up a portion of her trade to Alice? After the experience with young Kennedy and other similar ones it would be wise to allow the girl to go about only among the better class of customers.

Alice could not stand the rough element; the vile talk, the insults, to which Maisie was impervious. For a year or so Maisie's trade had carried her more and more among "the swells." She was proud of the fact. To her it meant a distinct rise in "bizness," and she looked forward to the time when she could

drop the rougher places altogether. Yet some of the frequenters of these were her staunch friends, no one of whom would not say a good word for her when necessary. But "bizness was bizness" with Maisie, and recently it had become easier to dispose of a certain portion of her wares, for which shoe-strings, collar-buttons, and various other trifles, were only a shield, among the so-called better classes.

There was pride concerning her "children" in this. When Mag and little Bobby were older they need not look back upon anything of which to be ashamed in their mother's occupation. Thus the ignorant, hard-working woman reasoned. Although she well knew that honest hearts often masqueraded in rough places under the guise of poverty, and that immaculate shirt-fronts hid some of the vilest, yet respectability and success place their stamp of approval upon the well set-up man. Among these trade was both better and pleasanter.

At present the children were well cared for. One of the charitable institutions established for their kind took charge of them during the hours between their dismissal from school and dark. Maisie daily threw up her hands in surprise at the cleanly, kindergarten habits her small son brought into the home.

Was she now to put a check on all this? Must she lessen the sum of her earnings, and with extra toil seek a new route?

Toward morning she slept lightly, and the fate of Alice and her own children seemed balancing in a hugh pair of scales out in the channel. The fog-horn marked the overweight—first on one side, then on the other. Two against one—Alice against her own children—so the changing tide and the doleful horn sent them up—and down—these three dependents upon her decision.

Morning's clear sunlight dispelled the fog, also her own uncertainty. Her course was decided.

"Ye'd best come along wid me," she announced to Alice while they were eating their breakfast. "Oi've been a-thinkin' of it out, an' it'll be a rale help ter have ye take some o' me calls. There's the steamers comin' in an' out, an' the manny, *manny* calls at the offices."

"But these are your best places, Maisie, you mustn't—"

"Och, sure, Oi kin get plenty more! Niver ye moind."

Alice finished her breakfast in silence. Quietly she helped to put the tiny house in order, and sent two neat children to school.

Then she and Maisie set forth to the day's work. Up and down, in and out they went, a strangely matched pair. Gradually under the invigorating rays of the summer sun the green feather perked up and added an air of jauntiness to its owner's step.

Alice soon became weary, and by twelve o'clock was ready to join the throng of working-women who daily congregate in the ferry building to eat their noonday meal. Another innovation for Maisie! For without Alice could she not have carried her own hunk of bread and cheese to any nearby "joint" and drained a mug of beer in free fellowship and comfort?

Many tired women sat furtively eating, sometimes talking in groups of three or four, but always with the hushed air of expecting the next moment to be asked to move on.

Maisie was jubilant over her morning's success. Many of her customers had taken kindly to Alice and had promised to give her the same consideration which they had given her. Maisie's shrewd eyes had noted every sign of undue interest in the girl, and some of the names had been withdrawn from Alice's list with prompt decision. The majority remained, and on the whole the morning had been a promising one.

"Ye'll soon git used ter the trampin'," said Maisie when the noon hour was past. "Come along, we'll be movin'."

Thus it happened that at the foot of the great stairway Sandy met them as he came off the ferry-boat. When one is hastening to catch the only car for ten minutes which will suit one's purpose it tries a man's temper to collide with even the fairest of earth's creatures, but when the object is one of loathing the situation becomes decidedly tense.

Sandy glared at the green feather with prompt recognition. His lips framed a heartfelt malediction, prevented from utterance by a glimpse of Alice's delicate face; then he hurried on.

"That man hates me loike poison," said Maisie, defiantly shrugging her shoulders in Sandy's direction.

"Who is he?"

"Oi dunno. Oi guess he ain't so much hisself." Maisie straightened her hat and glanced a question of her companion.

"Yes, it's all right," fibbed Alice.

"Oi run inter 'im last night. He was wid that young Prescott, ye know, offen the 'Mongolia.'"

"Oh, Mr. Prescott? Is he a friend of his, I wonder?"

"Seems ter be."

"I didn't tell you that I used to know Mr. Prescott years ago at home, Maisie. His family lived near mine. He was a big boy when I was a little girl."

"Hm!—Is that so? Why didn't ye inter-juce yerself that day when I tuk ye on board instead o' standin' aroun' so dumb-like?"

"He wouldn't want to know me now," protested Alice shyly.

"Now, luk ahere, girl, Oi ain't advisin' ye ter be too bold, but Oi tell ye it takes a lot o' gall ter git along in this wurld, an' ye've jist got ter luk out fer yer chanstes wherever they be. Us humans is jist shufflin' 'roun in a big game anyway, same's these lottery tickets is shuffled when people buy one. They all has their different ways o' tákin' a chanst—some counts, an' some spits on their han's—but they kin never tell when they're goin' ter draw a prize. It's a hell of a game, beggin' yer pardon, but it is, fer sure!"

"I know, I know. I make up my mind so often that I am not going to care what anyone says, and just keep on trying—but—"

Alice's blue eyes grew dim. She thought of a husband dead, of months of ill-health, of a baby in a far-distant land who would grow up a stranger to her, from whom birth had

been given. Certainly her prizes had been few in this great game of which Maisie spoke.

Prizes? Her eyes cleared and she gazed at the rugged form trudging beside her. Where would she have been without this woman's friendship? Maisie herself would have been more astonished than anyone else had she been told that she was Alice's greatest prize drawn out of the human lottery. Yet, so she was.

After a few minutes' walk they came to the ocean steamer wharves, where several liners were docking, and the two women became a part of the busy scene. Alice's fatigue was forgotten. Her cheeks grew pink, and her eyes bright with excitement as she learned her lessons.

Maisie sized up situations with a practiced eye. "Jist watch me!" she adjured her companion.

She was familiar with every sign which brought customers to her.

Among the passengers, the smoking-room gambler must be approached in an altogether different fashion from the "Social Hall" card player. From their walk down the gang-plank she judged whether their pockets were full or empty, and by keeping her keen ears open to conversations between custom officials

and would-be smugglers, she often spotted her best patrons. "Second Cabins" and "Steerages," she had discovered, turned more of their cash into her bag than "First Cabins," but Maisie never enjoyed making sales in the steerage. It was there that she pressed her sales of buttons and shoe-strings in preference to taking money from these poor people. The richer ones—well, they knew what they were about. Let them take their chances.

Every now and then she introduced Alice to an old customer and explained how her own work was "gittin' most too much for her, and she'd taken on an assistant."

Toward the latter part of the afternoon they reached the great China steamer where it lay unloading its cargo. On the saloon deck stood Second Officer Prescott, for he was expecting some visitors at four o'clock. Near him, lounging against the rail, was Sandy, his interest centered in the busy scene below.

"Hello, Maisie! How goes it?" called Prescott, as the women came near.

Maisie nodded. "Foine, sir. How's yer-self?"

Alice glanced up at the two men, her shy nod including them both, and Sandy, with a start, discovered himself returning it.

"How's business?" continued Prescott.
 "Wait a minute, I'm coming down."

Maisie's explanation to him as to her change of route was nonchalant and elaborate, yet failed to be convincing.

"See here, I'm not much on for this plan," he announced, eyeing Alice doubtfully.

The latter colored under his gaze. What right had he to object? Secretly she was glad.

"It takes a—a Maisie," went on Prescott, "to stand the hard knocks of a pedlar's life."

"Sure Oi've made a picked list fer Alice," interposed her manager proudly. "What's this ye call it? It's—it's—expurgated, it is. Sure me bizness is so big Oi cud niver manage the half of it anny more."

Again the young officer eyed her keenly. He saw through her little ruse, and he paid tribute to the big, kind heart which prompted it.

"You're a trump, Maisie. May I look over the list?"

"Here it is," said Alice, giving him a small memorandum book from her shabby bag.

Prescott wished to talk over this matter with Maisie. There were some things he wanted to say to her which were not suitable for Alice's pretty ears. How could it be man-

aged? Glancing up he saw Sandy, still intent upon the group of busy workmen below. How many stories he had read in their grimy faces only Sandy knew.

From time to time the wind wafted the sound of Prescott's and the women's voices up to him, but a characteristic fit of contrariness was upon him, and he preferred to ignore Prescott's visitors. The annoyance of the encounter at the ferry still rankled. Suddenly his friend's voice was directed toward him.

"Sandy, ahoy!" he shouted. "I wish you'd come down here. I want you to meet some friends of mine."

A devil of mischief possessed him. He deliberately braved the reckoning which he knew would be his later. Sandy's look of grim surprise furnished the young officer with enough amusement at the present moment to compensate for future misery.

Sandy did not hurry, but in due time, with only partially concealed ire, he joined the group.

Prescott presented him with ceremony, but came to a surprised halt over Maisie's name. "Mrs.—Mrs.—," he stammered.

She laughed good-naturedly. "Och, cut out the Missis! Iverybody calls me Maisie. Sure, they've all fergotten the rest, includin'

meself!"

In spite of himself, Sandy smiled. Could there be, after all, something more to the woman than the green feather and the lottery tickets?

But what was this which that fiend, Prescott, was saying?

"Miss Alice is interested in steamers, Sandy. Suppose you show her over the quarters a bit while I have a business deal with Maisie."

Alice doubtfully surveyed her proposed escort, but Sandy, always ready for the unexpected, took the dare. It only elaborated the details of the day of reckoning for Prescott.

"With pleasure," he answered, to Alice's surprise, and together they ascended the gangway and disappeared, leaving Prescott and Maisie to arrange the girl's future between them.

On board the great steamer a busy crew was scrubbing and cleaning, putting everything in order for sailing. Sandy conducted the girl up and down companionways, through "Social Hall" and dining saloon, with few comments.

Several of the state-rooms also came in for inspection as well as two or three of the officers' apartments. They paused at the door of

the Second Officer's cabin. It stood open. Alice looked in with curious eyes.

It was a gay little place, hung with streamers, posters, photographs, and other sentimental mementos from many climes.

"Is—is he married?" she asked, curiosity getting the better of her timidity.

"Not he! He's the typical sailor, a sweetheart in every port."

"Oh!" Alice involuntarily stepped forward. Across the narrow cabin she could see distinctly a row of photographs on the mirror shelf above the dresser. The central picture was a tiny old-fashioned one of a little girl about five years old. A pretty wooden frame encircled it, and at the top the words, "My Mascot," shone in gold.

"Oh!" again exclaimed Alice, and sat down quickly on the divan under the porthole.

"Eh?" questioned Sandy, alarmed. He did not favor the idea of a fainting girl on his hands.

"He does remember me," Sandy thought he heard Alice say, but he could not be sure. The girl composed herself quickly, and without another look at the photograph left the cabin followed by a puzzled escort. Sandy said nothing until they reached the "Social Hall" again which was now deserted.

"Something is troubling you. Can I do anything?" he asked.

Sandy's voice could be very kind. It was so now, holding a note of encouragement which was irresistible. All at once Alice found herself pouring a torrent of confidences into his willing ears. Somehow people always did confide in Sandy when *he* was willing.

She did not tell him why, but the sight of the little framed photograph on Prescott's dresser had started a chain of memories in the girl's mind. Seated there in the quiet saloon of the great ocean liner, she narrated in brief, excited sentences, the important events of her life. Her account of the unhappiness of the past three years ending in the goodness of Maisie was somewhat jumbled. Sandy tried to pin her down to facts, not understanding the reason of her strange excitement, and finally succeeded.

He listened to an unusual eulogy from a girl of Alice's refined, sensitive character on a woman of Maisie's type. He was told of the harsh treatment received from the relatives-in-law in England, and how, but for Maisie's sheltering wing, Alice would have been homeless.

Sandy heard all this in a daze of revulsion.

He was assailed by self-accusing thoughts, yet at each one he retreated behind a barricade composed of a flaunting green feather and a bunch of lottery tickets.

"And I'll start out alone tomorrow. She has given me a list of names, and I'm going to help her all I can, selling buttons and tape, and—er—tickets," he heard.

"You are?" he shouted, sadly beset. His voice, resounding through the quiet saloon, struck Prescott, entering, with alarm.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Oh, nothing! We are just coming out. Miss Alice has seen enough."

Prescott regarded them intently, and Alice's gaze dropped before his. How could she summon up the courage to "interjuce" herself as Maisie had suggested! In great trepidation she went down on to the pier followed by the two men. All the way she felt the eyes of the young officer upon her, and sensed an approaching climax. Maisie was waiting for them, and lost no time in bringing the situation to a head.

"Alice has a little surprise fer ye, Mr. Prescott," she announced.

The girl looked at her appealingly but Maisie relentlessly continued, a beaming smile illuminating her broad, Irish face.

"Tell 'im yer family name, girl; let's see if he has anny memory left o' the old days."

Alice had few words at her command just then, and they came haltingly. "I'm—I'm—Alice Leslie—Phil."

Prescott gazed at her with stupefaction. Then a great burst of light staggered him. How had he been so stupid! In that moment he knew the *why* of his ever-increasing interest in Maisie's protégée.

"Alice!" he cried. "Why, of course you're Alice! What an idiot I've been not to know you all along!"

"Why—should you remember me? It's been so long—and I have changed—and—"

"Changed! Why, Alice, you haven't changed a bit, now that my eyes are open. Do you know what you've done all these years? You've traveled around the world with me and been my mascot!"

Sandy had fears for his friend's sanity, but Alice understood and smiled happily.

"That silly little photo! Fancy your keeping it all this time!"

There was much more to be said, but just then a party of people with great chatter and laughter alighted from a machine at the head of the pier.

"Hang it all, there's my company!" grumbled Prescott.

Sandy's self-satisfied world was tumbling topsy-turvy. Usually he was the rebel against social functions, and now behold the hospitable Second Officer repudiating invited guests!

"I'll see you this evening," Prescott hastily continued. "My friends are here; you will have to excuse me now."

As Maisie and Alice left the pier the sound of gay greetings came to them, and the girl's heart grew heavy; yet through her sadness one happy thought came. After all she was not altogether forgotten. While the world had given her above the average share of misfortune, all unknown to herself she had lived in someone's life under the magic title of "Mascot!"

Later, when Prescott thought that the time for his settlement with Sandy had come, he found that individual strangely non-committal. He made little comment while Prescott narrated many incidents concerning the child, Alice, and himself during their early years.

"They moved away; her father met with reverses, and we lost all trace of them. I suppose they had a lot of pride and sort of lost

their grip on the world. I've never forgotten my little chum."

He was standing in front of the mirror as he spoke, and picked up his mascot's picture.

"Oh!" ejaculated Sandy, comprehending at last Alice's sudden collapse in Prescott's cabin.

"Yes," continued his friend dreamily. "I even used to call her my little sweetheart, but now—of course—"

"But now—of course!" gibed Sandy.

The settlement came then, and pillows and divan cushions were the chief weapons, but books and other handy trifles were also used until two breathless combatants cried "quits!"

That evening Prescott and Sandy called at the shabby little cottage on the hill. Over the channel not a trace of fog lingered. The doleful voice of the horn was silent. The scales were evenly balanced that night, and tired Maisie slept soundly.

Next morning in spite of opposition Alice started out alone on her new business venture.

Three months later the "Mongolia" was again in port. Sandy and Philip Prescott were enjoying their usual quarterly period of comradeship, yet the latter was unaccountably busy at times over matters which took him away from his friend.

On the third morning Sandy received a telephone message at the office. Prescott's voice greeted him.

"Hello! That you, Sandy?—Say, I want you to have a quiet little wedding in your rooms tonight."

"Wed—?" gasped the amazed Sandy.

"Yes, Alice and I are going to be married. We'll go away into the country for a few days. I've got a transfer from the home office for a commission on another route, so next week we're going to sail as guests on my own ship."

"B—but—!" stammered Sandy.

"We'll have the ceremony about eight o'clock; and, I say, old man, I'll depend upon you to bring Maisie. No other guests. So long!"

Sandy fell away from the receiver bereft of speech and consecutive thought. All that day life's perplexities whirled through his brain. He yielded up his apartment as though weddings were nightly occurrences therein, and stood by dumbly watching the few necessary preparations taking place. He was losing his friend. One big protest was in his heart. It included Alice, weddings, and above all, Maisie.

Seven-thirty, nevertheless, found him and Maisie walking toward his apartment. It

was a considerable distance from the shabby little cottage, yet Sandy chose to walk. The green feather had decided the matter. To enter a street car in company with that flaunting plume was one step further than his present state of mind could carry him. Then—suppose the Blue-Eyed Lady should happen to see them! How could he ever explain!

“If she wears that feather tonight,” he had thought earlier in the day, “*we walk!* Otherwise—”

So seven-thirty discovered them trudging companionably down the hill.

To the green feather Maisie had added a cerise pompom. This, she thought, gave an appropriate touch to the present festive occasion. A pair of cheap white gloves covered her capable red hands. Maisie was quite prepared to do honor to her friends.

Half an hour later Alice took another chance in the great Human Lottery. Simultaneously Prescott took his also.

“Why didn’t you try long ago to get a better job, Maisie?” asked Sandy, as they walked away after toasting an exceedingly happy pair.

Maisie had mentioned having to take up Alice’s work again herself.

She looked at him with mild scorn. The green feather trembled.

"Sure, Oi guess whin ye've got two young uns yellin' around fer food ye ain't got much toime ter wait fer a swell job ter come yer way. Oi had ter take the first chanst Oi got. It paid well, an' Oi kep' it. Oi don't fool nobody. Whin my ole man played me the scurvy trick an' run off Oi niver had no toime ter choose. The chanst jist came an' Oi tuk it. Life's jist all a big chanst, ain't it, Mr. Sandy? *Maybe* a better wan'll come me way some day!"

All green feather and lottery ticket barriers toppled and were strewn behind them as they climbed the hill, and Sandy said "good-night" at Maisie's door with more respect than he would have paid royalty.

Slowly he walked away again to his now deserted apartment pondering these truths in his heart.

A week later the "Mongolia" steamed through the Golden Gate. On board were Second Officer Prescott and his living "Mascot," while once more the green feather appeared, fluttering up and down the docks of incoming and outgoing vessels.

“AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM”

Late one afternoon a pale young woman sat at an upper window in an apartment-house near the outskirts of the city. The light was fading, and she moved closer and closer to the pane to catch the last rays of light on her sewing. Under her clever fingers a fashionable outfit for a cheap doll was nearing completion.

Finally she held up the result, balanced on her hand, surveying it with a weary smile of satisfaction. Bless the kiddie, how her eyes would shine when she saw it! Think of her being five years old day after tomorrow! How the months and years had flown since those dread days preceding the baby's coming, when the future had looked so hopeless!

Just now the outlook was not altogether promising either, but she was feeling stronger the last day or so, and soon she hoped to be able to resume work. While the young woman twirled on her fingers, with all the pleas-

ure of a girl, the dainty little figure of her creation, the room door opened, and an older woman, clothed in street attire, entered.

"Hello, Rosie! Why are you home so early? What's up?"

"Nothing much. I just thought I'd run out and see how you were getting along. How goes it, Blue?"

"I'm fine," answered the other, her words belied by the weariness with which she leaned back in her chair, the doll slipping from her limp hand.

"See here," scolded Rosie, "didn't I tell you to keep quiet and not be working over that fool stuff?"

Rosie brushed the doll aside, and stood over the girl she called "Blue," looking down at her with half-reproachful, half-loving eyes.

"Now, Rosie, quit your bluffing," smiled Blue Belle wanly. "You know I had to finish that, or Daisy wouldn't have any birthday present."

"When's the kid's birthday?" demanded the other.

"Day after tomorrow."

"Is that so? Well, there's no use o' your giving her a funeral for a birthday present. Listen! Come along over here and lie down and quit your nonsense!"

Half lifting the weak form, Rosie Myers, cabaret dancer and entertainer of sorts, led Blue Belle to the bed. Making her lie down, she threw a light spread over her, then began laying aside her own outdoor garments.

"I don't know yet why you're home so early," said Blue Belle.

"Humph! Henderson's on the tirade again. He don't believe you've been sick, and—"

The girl on the bed raised herself hurriedly and stared at the other with wide eyes.

"Why, Rosie, surely you told him I'd be back again in a few days?"

"Lie down, girl! There—I won't tell you any more unless you do as I say."

"All right, I'm down," smiled Blue. "Go on."

"He thinks I'm lying about you, being such a liar himself. 'See here, Henderson,' I says, 'you leave it to me when she comes back. The girl's been sick all right. I'll have her on hand again day after tomorrow, sure.'"

"'Well, she'd better be here,' he says, 'or she'll be losing her job. I can't be holding it for her much longer.'"

"Day after tomorrow! Oh, Rosie, I wanted just that one day for Daisy! Couldn't he make it one more day, I wonder?"

Rosie's dark, florid face, with its carefully manipulated "street make-up" rather the worse for wear, assumed a menacing expression.

"I'll see to that if I have to—, well, no matter! You listen to me. You behave yourself like you oughter, and we'll all chip in and give the kid such a party like she never had, believe *me*!"

"Oh, Rosie, you're an old sweet!" sighed Blue.

"Aw, cut it out!" said Rosie. "Henderson's got another girl down there, from Cardoni's, to take your place, but natchally she don't fit the bill. You can't find a Blue Belle in a hurry, you betcher! But I tells him, I says, 'Why don't you pay us girls a few dollars more and keep us alive? You make enough on the drinks, the rotten stuff!' I says. Lord, he was mad! 'I manages my business to suit myself, Miss Myers,' he says."

"You'd better not talk that way to him," warned Blue Belle. "Don't you run any risks with your own job."

"I guess he knows which side his bread's buttered on," responded Miss Myers complacently. "I could just yank all those girls away if I'd a mind to, not that they'd be much loss! The most of 'ems the sweet, sappy sort, ain't

got no pep. Takes you to put the jazz into 'em, Blue."

Blue smiled again faintly. Not much "jazz" left in her tonight, that was sure.

"Tell him to give me two more days, Ro, that's all I ask. He's not paying me my fifteen a week, so what does he care!"

"He says the line of custom you bring in is falling off."

"Tell him I'll work harder than ever on the side when I get back, I sure will." A bitter look crept into her wonderful eyes. "There's not much use of my holding myself so high, Rosie. Joe's gone for good. I sort of set this birthday of Daisy's as the limit. She's five years old now. If he'd wanted me, or cared anything for her, he'd 've come back by now. What's the use—she's got to have an education and everything! I give in."

Blue's face was turned to the wall, and silence lasted for several minutes in the little room.

"It'll be all right, don't you fret," encouraged the ever-optimistic Rosie, whose experience as a one-time chorus girl, now risen to her present status of cabaret dancer, and coach to the new girls, made her conscious of an assured position in the community whereof all persons of the opposite sex were to be

either scorned or conciliated as the occasion demanded.

"What do you say to a cheese sandwich and a bucket o' 'suds' for your supper? I'll run down to the corner for 'em."

"I couldn't eat a bite. Bring me a milk-shake, like an angel."

"Milk-shake!" exclaimed Rosie scornfully. "How do you expect to get any strength in you, girl?"

"Oh, well, fix it up anyway you like! I'll take it." Once again the girl's face was turned to the wall, and Rosie, after a moment's thought, went out and slammed the door.

Then silence deepened in the room, and darkness slowly came, while a little birthday doll in gay, fashionable clothes, lay face downward on the floor near the window.

The "Merry Whirl" café, run by "Spike" Henderson, did a rousing business at all times, but especially on the days when many vessels were in port, and the sailors came ashore on leave. This was during the period when the "lid was off," and countless numbers of the youth of both sexes strayed at will among the damning red lights of the great city.

The "Merry Whirl" was one of the most

popular of the eating-places near the waterfront, and, on the whole, well run. Henderson prided himself on catering to the so-called "better class" of café patrons. On the surface respectability reigned. It was never definitely known just what standing his entertainers held in the community. Presumably they went each night after their strenuous contributions to the evening's program to virtuous homes. It was none of Henderson's affair what happened to them out of cabaret hours. He would have thought them fools, however, if they did not take advantage of following up opportunities offered them during that time.

The munificent sum of fifteen dollars a week to the ordinary dancers was barely enough to keep them from starvation, after the price of costumes and room rent was deducted. Even Blue Belle, whose drawing value was so great, received no more than that, save on rare occasions when her services were demanded for extra "turns." Rosie Myers, holding the proud position of coach as well as dancer, received the fabulous sum of eighteen dollars a week. With this she paid a small portion of her expenses. Rosie was extravagant in her tastes, and money ran through her careless fingers to needy relatives or to fur-

nish her own broad back with seasonable attire.

Several hours later in the evening, after having given Blue Belle the milk-shake, and tucked her comfortably into bed, Rosie was responding to uproarious applause from a mixture of sailors, soldiers, ordinary men, and their girls, in great numbers, all seated at small tables around which swayed and circled films of grey-blue smoke, while ice clinked, and glasses were filled and refilled unstintingly.

Rosie glanced nonchalantly out over the crowd, knowing full well that her own good-nature played a large part in her favorable reception, for youth and grace were gradually disappearing with the years.

Entering at that moment from the street were two unattached men, one a well-known frequenter of the place, the other a stranger.

They stood for a few minutes surveying the gay scene, while Rosie descended from the platform and stopped to give and take all sorts of badinage. She had seen the two men enter, and "spotted" a new man, but she was diplomatically blind at the moment to their presence.

"Some gay little place, eh, Sandy?" exclaimed the taller of the two, Ralph Carlton,

special column writer on one of the evening papers.

"You bet you!" agreed the smaller, brown-haired one, alert at once to all the possibilities presented.

"See here, you must meet the powers that be—Chef Henderson's around somewhere. Hello, Rosie, how's every little thing? Allow me to present my friend."

Rosie's start of pleased surprise was well-feigned, also her assumption of the high-class society "dame" awaiting a properly formal introduction.

"Why, Mr. Carlton, where did you spring from? And—er—?" An enquiring pause.

"Miss Myers, meet my best friend, the renowned and—"

"Oh, cut out all that dope, Ralph!" broke in a burry, old-country voice. "Don't listen to him, Miss Myers; he's nuts, you know. I'm not renowned at all, and my friends all call me Sandy."

"But I am hardly in that class yet," demurely protested Miss Myers.

"I have a bet with myself that you soon will be," audaciously declared Sandy.

"I can see that you're a cutey, all right," was her quick response.

Rosie was in her element now, and Sandy

could follow a lead as well as the next one. Wending their way in and out among the mass of tables, they found one to their liking, leaving Carlton to follow, amazed, at the erstwhile blasé Sandy who had shown no interest whatever only an hour previous to being shown this "peach" of a resort. Miss Myers, it seemed, had now finished her part on the evening's bill; her duties, except those of hostess, were over.

Carlton's pretense of jealousy over the attentions paid her by his friend, delighted her, and with the addition of a bountiful supper ordered by the two men, in which a plentiful supply of drinks played a part, Rosie settled down to the full enjoyment of the evening.

"I say, Rosie, I came here specially tonight to introduce my friend to the Queen. Where is she?"

Rosie's air of injury was superb. Sandy took up the cudgels in her defense.

"I have already met the Queen," he lied gallantly, bowing over his glass toward the lady. "What are you talking about, Ralph?"

"Oh, fudge! Rosie knows who I mean. Where's Blue Belle? I haven't seen her for two weeks."

For a moment Rosie's countenance

changed, but habit held the joy lines, and she laughed.

"Oh, she's all right! She can't waste her time down here every night. She's a winner, Blue Belle is; I'm proud of that girl, she does credit to my teaching."

"Are you giving us the low-down, Rosie?"

"Sure, what do you think?"

"Well, Blue Belle's always been square with me, and I'd hate to think—"

"Well, stop thinkin', what's the use! Blue Belle's on the high now, believe *me*! What'll you have, boys?"

They had "another," and under its influence Rosie waxed even more genial, while the music wailed on, and a girl in Portola colors "interpreted" her own erroneous idea of a snake-charmer.

"Blue Belle's one of the clever sort," confided Rosie in Sandy's ear.

"I don't like 'em clever," he growled, his fit of ennui rushing back upon him. Suddenly Rosie, Carlton, the music, the drinking, gorging crowd—all their tribe—sickened him, and he sought means of a swift escape.

"Well, not too clever," amended Rosie. "She'll be back to work Friday. Blow in then, you'll like her. She's the lively little dancer;

am I right, Ralphie? And so sweet and good!"

"Sure thing!" agreed Carlton, with a wink at Sandy. Then, during a burst of applause accorded the "interpretation," he whispered a few words in his friend's ear in regard to the possible advances that might be made along the road of Blue Belle's "goodness."

"Just the same, I don't like the idea of her giving us the go-by down here," he continued aloud. "I don't fancy these high-toned dames myself, neither does Sandy."

"*I should say not!* None of them in mine," muttered the latter.

"You can just tell Blue Belle that she can go to the place that rhymes with her name, for all of me! Tell her I brought a swell gent, my best friend—"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Sandy.

—"down here to meet her tonight. He was all out of sorts and wanted a good time, and here's she's gone back on us like this!"

"Let's have another," irrelevantly interposed Rosie, and until "another" was served following her imperious command to a waiter, her attention could not be claimed by either of the two men.

"Here's hoping!" she smiled, raising her

glass, and the ceremonial took place amid the usual serious smacking of lips. "Now I've got a swell plan. You two come out to the house tomorrow for lunch, and I'll arrange a meeting for you with Blue Belle. I'll see if she can manage to sneak off from one of her engagements and give us an hour or two on the quiet. She'll give you a good time all right," pointedly to Sandy. "And I guess I can take care of my little friend here at the same time."

She smiled fondly at Carlton, leaning lazily back in her chair. Rosie was completely and supremely happy at the moment.

"Well, I don't exactly know whether we can," temporized Carlton, seeing no deep interest depicted in Sandy's face, and hesitating to bring down a characteristic string of maledictions upon his own unfortunate head later. "We're not much on for parties, you know, and—"

"Parties? Who said it was a party?" protested Rosie. "Just an exclusive little—what's this your Lady Society Column calls it—? 'Foursome,' that's it! Come on now, don't be tight!"

"You're too high-priced for us, Rosie," laughed Carlton. "We're poor working-men."

"Who's talking about any price? You

make me tired. Bring a few bottles of beer with you, that's enough."

He glanced dubiously at his friend, expecting a rebuff, but received the result of an impulse instead.

"I shall be delighted," declared Sandy.

"What time did you say those gents would be here?" Blue Belle asked Rosie the following morning.

"I set a real swell time for lunch, one-thirty," she answered, hurriedly running a sweeper over the cheap carpet, and banging it noisily against the sewing-machine, around which bits of cloth, silk, and threads were scattered. "I do wish Mother Sullivan would pick up her scraps when she gets through."

"She was awful late last night finishing the skirt of Mame's costume," said Blue Belle. "Poor soul, she was one tired old woman!"

"Well, it's about time Mame had a new one. She'd soon be falling clear out of the old one."

The carpet-sweeper was emphatically placed out in the hall, and Rosie began to wield a cock's plume duster with whirlwind results.

"Here, let me do that," said Blue Belle, trying to take the duster into her own hands.

"Not on your life. You're the swell dame today. Go and put on your blue velvet, and do your hair all pretty. Remember now, you've just broken away from your other engagements for an hour or so, on the q. t. for the sake of old friends. I don't know how this new guy will pan out. He may not be a live one, but I thought it worth trying."

Blue Belle's eyes filled. She looked away and shivered nervously, as Rosie's duster made jarring sounds on the piano keys, and several sheets of music fluttered to the floor. She stooped and picked them up.

"I wish you hadn't asked them to come to-day."

"Why not?"

"I wanted to fix some little things for kiddie's party tomorrow, and—"

"Oh, don't you worry! You'll have time for that all right. We'll all stick in. Mother Sullivan promised to give something, you know, and I'll run down to the corner after they're gone and order some ice cream and cakes, and—"

"Oh, Rosie, you mustn't!"

"See here, who's doing this? You're awfully in my way. I wish you'd go and dress. I've got to coach Mame in her new solo before

lunch; she's got to put it over this evening."

"Where is Mame?"

"Cooking lunch; where'd you suppose? I began it, but I had to break away to do this."

"Oh!" said Blue Belle, and hurried out into the kitchen where frowzy-haired, black-eyed Mame, during the humdrum process of getting lunch for Blue's "swell friends", was enlivening the odd moments by rehearsing her "turn" in the narrow space between stove and sink.

"Go along and try over your song, Mame; Rosie's waiting for you," urged Blue. "I'll do this." She took the egg-beater from Mame's unresisting hand, and the latter vanished into the living-room.

All was in order when, about two hours later, the guests arrived.

Mame, in neat cap and apron, her frowzy hair smoothed hastily, showed them into the living-room. Blue Belle was a trifle late in appearing, but Rosie graciously arose from the piano stool whither the ring at the door-bell had sent her a moment before, with an air of having been pleasantly interrupted.

"Hello, boys!" she greeted them genially. "Come in; glad to see you."

"Don't let us disturb you, keep right on," suggested Carlton.

Sandy tried to nod pleasantly, hoping that she wouldn't.

"I'm only too glad to be interrupted," she said gaily. "Such a relief to do something else once in awhile!"

"Must be," agreed Sandy, his gaze roving alertly about the room while he made mental notes of what he saw. The dust was not now apparent, having been moved by the cock's plume duster from the furniture to the many-hued carpet. The music scattered on the piano showed only an artistic confusion to be expected in this home. There were few ornaments. Several empty bottles, and glasses, stood on a side-table quite naturally as a part of the household life. Books, magazines, where were they? he wondered. Some fashion papers lay about. For other reading matter this busy set of women had no time. Their only books were the stories gossiped about in the lives around them. The world news they read in headlines held high in the newsboys' hands.

All this and more suggested itself to Sandy's psychic sense, while Carlton "joshed" with Rosie and wondered where Blue Belle kept herself.

"She came in about three minutes before

you did," fibbed Rosie. "Didn't you see her limousine drive away?"

"No, we didn't!" laughed Carlton loudly, while Sandy wondered how he did it.

"Well, here's herself now," said Rosie, with the air of announcing a personage.

The blue velvet matched Blue Belle's eyes. It was of a fair quality, and Mother Sullivan considered it her "cheff doover" in the way of costume making. "Straight out of 'Vogue,' " Rosie was fond of telling her.

A bit of rouge and pink powder erased the tired lines and concealed the pallor of yesterday. Blue Belle's hair was tastefully dressed. Apparently she looked her own vivacious, pretty self, as Rosie proudly introduced Sandy.

"He don't seem to have no name, Blue," she laughed. "Mr. Man, meet my chum, Miss Lamson."

Sandy scarcely heard the words, although he mechanically murmured a greeting. Surprise at the type of girl confronting him held him dumb a moment.

She accepted his apparent homage with little interest. She was accustomed to it; it was a pose all men adopted under similar circumstances.

Today it was an understood thing. that

she was to give this stranger a "good time," in exchange for a pecuniary recompense, but why become unduly excited about it? She greeted Ralph Carlton in a cordial enough spirit. He was Rosie's "friend" for the afternoon, therefore one need not play a part with him.

"Hello, Blue, what's all this about giving Henderson's the go-by?" demanded Carlton jovially. "You're queering the place. It was like a funeral down there last night."

Rosie whirled round on the piano stool. "A thousand thanks, Ralphie! You can think of the choicest things to say."

"You're always an angel, Rosie!" protested Carlton. "Away out of the funeral class."

"While you would like *me* to play the animated corpse, eh?" asked Blue Belle.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Lamson," broke in Sandy, whose habitual poise had returned. "He's a gay deceiver." Continuing, he told her of the previous evening, how Carlton had inveigled him into visiting the "Merry Whirl" under false pretenses. To hear her sing, to see her dance, these had been the only reasons for which he had consented.

This and much more Sandy told the girl, while Mame went noiselessly back and forth

setting the first course of luncheon on the table.

Suddenly the empty chatter was interrupted by a plainly-dressed, middle-aged woman making her appearance in the doorway, and as suddenly backing out again. Over her arm hung a bright-hued bunch of material.

"Oh, I forgot you was having company!" she exclaimed.

Rosie's face expressed annoyance. "I told Mame to tell you," she muttered, with an impatient look toward the girl, who was placing salad in front of the guests.

Mame gave a saucy shrug, not quite in keeping with her supposed position in the household, at which Sandy, under cover of the women's preoccupation, glanced quizzically at his friend. "It's all a part of the game," he thought.

Blue Belle was more kindly disposed concerning the incident than Rosie.

"Come in, Mother Sullivan," she called, and the woman reappeared. "Don't mind us. Do you need to use the machine?"

"Just a bit of stitching," hesitated Mother Sullivan.

"All right, come along in," laughed Rosie boisterously. "I guess these gents have seen

a sewing-machine before. Mame's costume has got to be finished by tonight, you see, so if you don't mind—"

"Sure! How are you, Mother?" exclaimed Carleton.

The woman included both men in her nod as she made her way around the table.

"Mame!" queried Sandy of Blue Belle, his eyes following the girl who was entering from the kitchen carrying two more plates of salad.

"Miss Sullivan, make you acquainted with our friends." Blue Belle smiled indifferently. "She likes to help us out sometimes, don't you, Mame?"

"Sure. You don't suppose I wear these things all the time, do you?" she demanded, fixing Sandy with her bright, black eyes, and indicating her cap and apron.

"I really had not given the matter much thought," admitted Sandy, with mild sarcasm.

The girl's slight flush of resentment amused him, and he devoted himself to the plate before him, his interest in this household growing each minute.

The sewing-machine stood in the corner where Sandy sat, so when he had finished his rather oily salad it was natural for him to turn around and comment on the really beau-

tiful fabric, in color at least, upon which Mother Sullivan was occupied.

"T'is fine," she assented. "Good color for my girl, eh?"

"Splendid," agreed Sandy. "Dances, does she?"

"Oh, yes, most anything! They give her the 'spot' on this, and it's great."

A tiny garment of cheap mull and cotton lace dropped from among the folds of the gay-colored material. Sandy rescued it from the floor. It looked like a child's dress. He made no comment, but Mother Sullivan, much flattered by the interest of the stranger guest, became loquacious, while Carlton held the attention of the three other women.

"Pretty thing, ain't it? That's my little surprise for Daisy. Don't let Blue Belle see it," confided she, spreading the little dress lovingly on her knee.

"And who might Daisy be?" asked Sandy idly, not caring at all to know. Some four or five-year-old brat, he judged, by the size of the garment.

Not at all sure whether she should be divulging these facts, Mother continued in an undertone, her enjoyment keen the while. It was not often such an opportunity came her way.

Daisy was Blue Belle's little girl, he was told. At this, Sandy started and regarded the young mother across the table with newly-opened eyes.

Tomorrow was the child's birthday. Oh, no, she didn't live there, they were all too busy to take care of a youngster! Blue had to keep her in a little private school where they took in a few to board. It was awful expensive too! But tomorrow she was coming home for the whole day. Why, they'd all been planning it for a week! No visitors were expected on *that* day, you betcher! It was going to be Daisy's day. O' course it *was* too bad her mother had been so sick, she'd lost two whole weeks' salary, and now she couldn't get Daisy lots of things she'd expected to, but—

"How about all her other engagements?" asked Sandy softly.

Mother Sullivan's face was blank. "What other engagements?" she asked.

"That's what I'm asking you," said Sandy. "I understood that she was very busy filling many engagements at present."

"Don't you believe it. Where'd you get that stuff?" exclaimed Mother. "She's been flat on her back for the best part of two weeks, and anyway, there's far too many in this busi-

ness now. It just keeps them hopping to land new work."

"But about the child's party?" Sandy wanted to know.

"Sure, we're all going to chip in and have *some* doings. The dress is finished, and Mame's made a cake, and Rosie—"

Sandy could stand no more. The four walls of the close little room seemed closing in upon him. Something clutched his throat and almost stopped his breathing.

"Where's the child's father?" he managed to ask.

Mother Sullivan regarded him with unmitigated scorn; not, however, directed toward him personally. "He needn't show his sneaky face around here," she announced. "We'd step on it, if he did. Daisy *ain't got no father!*"

"Oh!" answered Sandy, and something in his intonation partially placated her indignation.

"She ain't seen him for four years or so. Oh, yes, she was married to him all right enough, but she don't need him no more. Why, she's the prize bunch o' joy down at the 'Merry Whirl.' She puts it all over the rest of 'em there, I tell you!" Mother's plain face shone with honest pride.

Sandy turned from the sewing-machine and looked across the table.

Dessert, a mixture of cloying sweet stuff, was being placed before them. Apparently no one had noticed his prolonged confab with Mother Sullivan. Possibly he had already been labelled a "dead one" by his hostesses.

The new eyes with which he regarded Blue Belle revealed a change in her expression; it was duller, the vivacious lines were drooping, the girl was very weary. She turned to speak to Mame, and that young person nodded and went into the kitchen, reappearing in a moment carrying an iced cake slightly rough as to edges, but rosy in hue, a cake for an "entertainer" to be justly proud of on the whole. She placed it with much ceremony in the center of the table.

"Here, what's this?" demanded Rosie, a quick look passing between her and Blue Belle.

"Blue told me to bring it in," said Mame, defending herself.

"Oh, all right!" said Rosie, somewhat puzzled. "What's the idea, Blue?"

"I thought they might like to see Daisy's birthday cake," she answered nonchalantly. "She'll be five tomorrow, you know, Ralph."

He looked puzzled. "I don't get you, Blue. Who's Daisy?"

She assumed an air of mock dignity. "Daisy's me child. Do you mean to say you've forgotten about my daughter?"

Ralph stammered something about, well, long ago, perhaps, he *had* heard something of the sort, but he was never quite sure, and—

Blue Belle laughed mirthlessly. "Just as well you weren't. I don't have much time for the kiddie now, but some day, perhaps—!" Her eyes grew misty, and she turned aside to smooth an invisible wrinkle in the tablecloth.

"Well, sometimes you spend too much time on her," broke in Rosie, having been too long silent. "Here's what she's been wearing herself out over when she'd oughter been resting." Forthwith Rosie produced the small doll which had lain all night face downward on the bedroom floor. She now placed it right-side-up on the table beside the cake, and strewed its many little garments around it, laughing noisily in her good-natured way.

Sandy had nothing to say. He was planning as hasty an exit as was compatible with decency and common-sense. Only to be able to swear in the open was all he asked just then of life.

Carlton took the matter more calmly, not being a student of humanity, but merely one who took good-naturedly and somewhat

greedily whatever pleasure came his way, and asked no questions.

"Got any candles for the cake?" he demanded.

"Oh, curses, I forgot 'em!" exclaimed Mame. "Say, I got a nickel; gimme another," to Ralph, "and I'll get some."

He tossed her the desired coin. "Here—any other little thing," he suggested, looking enquiringly at Blue Belle, whose eyes were shining again at so little a thing as a five-cent piece for her baby's pleasure, and once more Sandy's heart annoyed him with its rising throb.

He suddenly drew out his watch. It was not a reliable time-piece, but such as it was it often helped him out of predicaments.

"Look here, Ralph, I'm due down town in twenty minutes," he announced brusquely. "Suit yourself about coming with me. I hope the ladies will excuse my running away. Business, you see," he explained rather lamely.

Ralph Carlton looked his surprise, but knew Sandy too well to protest in public.

"Why, I thought this was to be an all-afternoon affair!" insinuated Rosie, entirely forgetting the limited time which the popular "Miss Lamson" was supposed to be stealing from her numerous engagements.

"Sorry!" said Carlton, concluding to humor Sandy in his impulse, whatever it might be. "I'll go along with you," he told him. "'To be continued in our next,'" he quoted airily to Rosie. He turned just in time to catch a look of relief flit across Blue Belle's tired face which Sandy had already noted.

Outside, the fresh afternoon breeze brought back sufficient breathing material for Sandy, but he boarded a street-car with his friend in silence.

The car was crowded, the two men were separated by a medley of human beings.

"Where do we get off?" signalled Carlton, when the Market street shops began to slide past them.

"Emporium," was Sandy's laconic answer.

More mysteries! Then intelligence dawned in Carlton's brain. "Why not?" he thought. "I'll buy a few gimcracks too for the kid."

Very little was said when they entered the great Emporium, with its daily stream of shoppers pouring in and out of the wide doors. Sandy marched straight to the huge toy department by way of one of the many elevators.

What matter what he bought, or whether he and Carlton, during this novel occupation,

argued hotly over the relative values and allurements of a tiny go-cart and a tin kitchen outfit, or a sewing basket and a train of cars?

Sufficient to say that on the next day an innocent little child was made happier by several wonderful, enchanting gifts, and the birthday "party" enriched by unexpected "goodies" from the delicatessen counter.

All during his waking hours that night, and the following day, Sandy was conscious of the festivities going on in that strangely mingled home.

Late that afternoon he walked out Post street, it was a favorite stroll of his toward evening. A little earlier he had chanced to meet the Blue-Eyed Lady among the shops, and after even the shortest chat with her he always felt exhilarated by something to which he had not yet dared to give a name.

On Post street there were several shop-windows of which he was fond. He liked to see if certain pictures or books were there. Stopping in front of one of these, rather noted for its fine copies of celebrated paintings, his gaze was attracted by a picture which had been placed in the center of a group. It was not a new one. It is well-known in many homes. Life-size copies are to be seen in every large gallery. The central figure is a beau-

tiful, holy Child, the surrounding ones are beasts of every kind, both wild and tame, all held under the domination of that wonderful, Child-like innocence.

"A little Child shall lead them," thought Sandy, knowing the biblical title of the picture, and his thoughts, relentlessly going on, showed him his own and Carlton's selfish plans for their 'good time,' frustrated, and turned into higher channels by the influence of a "little child."

He thought of the frail young mother nightly evoking laughter at the "Merry Whirl," for fifteen dollars a week, in order that he, and others like him, might have their pleasure—while a "little child" went without its God-sent heritage.

Turning abruptly from the window, he was confronted by Ralph Carlton. He also was fond of strolling out Post street; he also saw the central picture in the shop-window. The eyes of the two men met. Sandy's comment was not expressed in biblical terms, but it was final:

"Carlton—ain't it hell?"

“A LAME DOG”

Giorgio was about twenty years old when Sandy first met him. Their acquaintance began unexpectedly, as often happens, and through the friendship which followed, Sandy's impulse theory was perhaps put to severer tests than at any period of his varied career.

When an auto-truck narrowly escaped crushing out Giorgio's life one day in Front street, Sandy chanced to be passing, and it was into his face that the dreamy brown, Italian eyes, frightened and beseeching, gazed, when several kindly hands assisted the boy to the sidewalk.

Now Giorgio had no morals of which he was conscious, and he possessed an ardent love for strong drink; two characteristics of which Sandy knew nothing at the time of rescue, although he suspected the latter of being the chief cause of the accident. It would have made no difference to Sandy, however, if he had known these things.

The auto-truck driver swore in the presence of witnesses the next morning that the "Dago" had tumbled off the sidewalk in the narrow street, right under his truck wheels, where congested traffic made it impossible for him to avoid injuring him. The Court believed the truck driver, which simplified the matter for him, but made it harder for Giorgio. The latter's habit of spending his precarious earnings up to the minute left him helplessly alone in an alien land after the accident.

As he lay writhing in pain on the sidewalk, it was Sandy's arms which raised him. When the ambulance came it was Sandy who assisted the officials, and became responsible for the boy's receiving special attention at the hospital.

The consequences of helping this "lame dog over a stile," came in due time.

Giorgio lay for some weeks in the hospital, visited occasionally by his protector. Each day the boy adored him with more intensity, and caused Sandy much discomfort by lavishing upon him in unstinted measure the warmth and gratitude of his Latin nature. It would be different when he was dismissed from the hospital, Sandy promised himself. Good Lord, he didn't want this Dago kid hang-

ing round his neck for the balance of his life! Where were all his people anyway? Giorgio had a happy disregard for his relatives. This appealed to Sandy, who had long ago placed all his own at a discount. There were times, however, when they might be useful, as in the present instance. Someone with the legal right to assist in the payment of Giorgio's medicine bills would be welcome.

Sandy questioned him, but it appeared a matter of small moment to the boy, who daily became stronger, and whose dreamy eyes again glinted with the expectancy of life in their depths.

After Sandy secured him a job with a packing company he considered his responsibility ended, and with a sigh of relief, the necessity for changing his own place of abode occurring at the moment, moved to a new apartment, and thought no more of the Italian.

It was nearly a year later that Sandy's habit of seeking new restaurants, and using them for a short time, became the means of giving Giorgio a clue to his kind friend's whereabouts. Returning one evening in the dusk, after an Italian dinner in a new location, Sandy became conscious of someone fol-

lowing him, and as he reached his own door, Giorgio flung himself impetuously in his way.

"At last I have founda you, my frien'!" he cried. "You have lefta me so long time. Now you coma to my place to eat. I have founda you, I have founda you!"

There was no denying that he was found. Trapped at his own door, Sandy capitulated.

"What's up now?" he demanded as though he had seen the boy only yesterday.

"I lika just to see you every day," explained Giorgio.

"Well, I don't mind your looking at me every day, if you don't bother me."

"Oh, no, I nota bother you!"

"Then it's a bargain?" asked Sandy, with a searching look.

"Mr. Sandy, I hava no more money," confessed Giorgio, hanging his head, his eyes slanting upward to watch the effect of this information.

"That's no news. You needn't have taken all this trouble to tell me that."

"It was verra harda work in that job you so kinda give me. I almost gotta seeck again."

In truth there was a frail look about the boy. Also there were no signs of strong drink apparent,

"I lika you give me another job," casually continued Giorgio.

"I haven't one in my pocket at this moment."

The jest fell flat on Giorgio's understanding; his thoughts were rapidly pursuing his own affairs.

"I lika maka much more money."

"So would I," agreed Sandy sympathetically. "What do you intend to do with all your money?" Heavens!—he might as well invite the boy in and form a partnership! There seemed no escape from this implicit confidence in his ability to furnish unlimited jobs and good-will.

"I don't like standing around on doorsteps. Come in and talk awhile inside," invited Sandy.

This was an unexpected honor, and Giorgio twirled his hat in nervous anticipation while his host led him up two long flights of stairs, and into a comfortable room which was Sandy's present "Hades," the name he always attached to the place which sheltered him and his belongings for the moment.

He turned on the lights, and relentlessly continued the subject of Giorgio's financial intentions.

The latter, seated on the edge of a

straight-backed chair (Sandy had carefully steered him past his couch) launched forth with great relish into many matters of personal history occurring during the year.

He needed "much money," it seemed, because of "Carlotta." Sandy was naturally curious about Carlotta, her whereabouts, and occupation.

"Carlotta", it was divulged with much bashful self-consciousness, was "verra pretty."

"Of course, I know that!" exclaimed Sandy. "Carlotta is always pretty!"

"Yes, Mr. Sandy," agreed Giorgio.

There were no stern parents in the way, only an elderly uncle, a fruit-monger in Pacific street; and Carlotta had also two big brothers.

The latter were not here now, but somewhere in a convenient country at a distance, where they did not seem likely to disturb the forthcoming plans of two optimistic young persons.

"Carlotta, she worka in the cannery sometimes, but I lika best when she worka in the fruit-store with her uncle," Giorgio confided.

Sandy could well understand this, and mentally conjured up the many additions

which this fruit-store might yield to the frugal meals of the young Italian.

Carlotta, in addition to being "verra pretty," was also strong. "Oh, yes, she could carry wood, mucha wood!" declared her lover, "and heavy pails of water." In every way she appeared suitable to be a model wife.

A very real interest was aroused in Sandy as he listened to this recital, and his resolution to bother himself no more with the boy lay broken into bits about him.

"I'll see what I can do for you," he assured him. "Come around tomorrow evening, I may have something. Meantime, you and Carlotta go slow. You're young yet, you know—there's plenty of time to think of marrying two or three years from now."

"Oh, yes!" agreed Giorgio. "Plenty time. We don't getta married yet, Carlotta and me."

The significance of this simple statement did not strike his hearer at the time, and as Giorgio took his departure Sandy heaved a sigh of relief that the remainder of the evening was his own, with which to do as he liked. A chapter in his weekly letter to the Blue-Eyed Lady would come first; then a loitering through the ever-fascinating city streets, until fatigue should drive him back to "the hay" and the kindly oblivion of sleep.

Not one job, but two or three, did Sandy tender Giorgio, each tried out for a few days, then slipped out of by that convincing youth.

One was too hard, "Oh, verra hard, Mr. Sandy!" It was Carlotta who told him this, as in the natural course of events it was considered necessary that he should meet the object of Giorgio's adoration.

An impish, black-eyed creature, she sparkled and flashed bits of fun and coquetry at anyone who came her way. "A valuable asset in the business of the fruit-monger," thought Sandy, as he observed her among the customers.

Another job which Giorgio held for a week was taken away from him by his employer. He caused jealousy among the other boys by his "damned winning ways," the man stated.

"My Giorgio, he is the one grand boy!" declared Carlotta, in confirmation of this.

In the fourth position he seemed likely to please, and to remain for a while at least, so Sandy permitted himself a brief breathing spell of relief. Then, ensued the sequence of events, compared to which the preceding faded into insignificance.

A more than usually excited Giorgio was discovered on Sandy's doorstep one evening when he returned from work, and begged

leave to come in and tell his "kinda frien' " something important. As each new step Giorgio took was important Sandy did not realize at the moment that the beginning of a new series of trouble for himself was upon him.

Upstairs, seated as usual on the edge of the straight-backed chair, Giorgio went at once to the vital point.

"I lika you tella me where I buy marriage 'certificato.' "

"What's that?" cried Sandy, his pipe suddenly puffing smoke into his eyes.

"Marriage 'certificato,' you know? You put in frama, hang 'em on wall," carefully explained Giorgio.

"Oh," answered Sandy; "I see! So the happy day approaches, eh? When are you going to get married?"

"I notta going to getta married," announced Giorgio simply. "I have notta yet mucha money, Mr. Sandy. I canno taka care Carlotta, and maybe she canno work all the time."

An idea of the boy's meaning began to dawn in Sandy's mind. He felt what was coming.

"Then why the marriage certificate?"

"You know where I cana buy one?"

"Oh, yes, there are plenty of places!"

"I lika to go where you buya yours," declared Giorgio.

"I have no regular place," responded Sandy with great seriousness; "I buy them wherever I happen to be."

"Is that so?" answered Giorgio politely.

"How much money have you? It takes a large sum, you know, to buy a marriage certificate."

"Nota much," evaded the boy. "I think maybe you lenda me—" One of the winning ways of which the former employer had spoken was brought into play, but Sandy hardened his heart.

"Just why do you want this now?" he asked, relentlessly pressing the point.

Giorgio's eyes grew beseeching. "Carlotta, she lova to hava the marriage 'certificato,' she lika to hang it on the wall, show her friends, oh, she hava many friends, Carlotta!"

"All very nice," Sandy admitted; "but why can't Carlotta wait a year or so for that artistic triumph?"

Giorgio did not follow this sarcasm in the slightest degree.

"The baby it comes in June," he announced.

Here was reason indeed. His listener pon-

dered in silence, while the prospective head of a family continued.

"We lova verra much, Carlotta and me. By and by when I am richa man we going to hava fine house, and veectrola, and maybe limousina for Carlotta." His face shone. "But now she worka two, three more months for her uncle, and he giva her home. I canno buy home for Carlotta now, I hava not enough money. I cana buy marriage 'certificato,' she hang it on the wall, it maka her verra happy, my frien'."

Thus pleaded Giorgio until Sandy's stern mind allowed his tender heart to agree to go himself on the morrow, and purchase a marriage "certificato" for the illegal pair.

Logic showed him no good reason for binding these two together at the present time. It might mean much future unhappiness for the young wife, whose uncle would more readily care for her and her child were there no impecunious husband in the foreground. Also the element of self-protection entered into Sandy's reasoning. He had no desire to assume all the financial responsibility of rearing a thriving young Italian family.

There is a shop in Market street where one may secure a highly ornamental "certificato" for a small sum, and it may be framed

or not as the purchaser desires. To be sure, the purchase is usually backed by the possession of a marriage license, safe in one's pocket, or else the certificate is presented to the happy couple by the officiating minister. The clerk in a stationery shop does not enquire into these matters, however; he merely shows the goods when asked for, and discreetly assists the buyer in the selection of an appropriate frame.

When Sandy ventured in to attend to his unusual bit of shopping nothing appeared easier or more commonplace.

It was when he turned about, after the selection of a white and gold frame, that he encountered the grinning face of his friend and fellow-clubman, Dan. He realized then that it was this presence which he had felt near him all during the purchase of the horrid object.

"Well, of all the sly dogs!" shouted Dan, who habitually spoke as though his hearers were at least fifty feet away. "You're a nice one, you are, trying to give us the slip like this! Here, tell me all about it. Who is she? When's it to be? Hang it all, you're pretty damned mean to treat your best friend this way!"

Sandy had so many "best friends," that

he had a hard time keeping count of them, and keeping them friends with each other when counted. Dan stood very near the top of the list, but just now he was in grave danger of tumbling to the bottom.

"I wish you'd go to hell and stay there!" exclaimed Sandy, slamming down the price of the white and gold object on the counter. "Not you," he explained to the astonished clerk, "but this 'butt-insky,' here. I don't recognize your right to question my purchases in this store. When I get ready to tell you anything, why, I'll tell you, that's all!" Whirling about he marched out of the shop with haughty mien, leaving Dan full of wrath and a desire for revenge.

Sandy would have passed a pleasanter evening had he assumed a more tolerant attitude. He admitted this to himself later.

Leaving the marriage certificate in his room he sauntered to the Club, thinking to dine there that evening for a change. Fatal resolve!

Dan had preceded him by two hours, and when Sandy entered the spacious "lounge" adjacent to the Club bar, a buzz of comment ran round the room. Its significance did not strike him as he walked serenely through, intent

upon ordering his favorite appetizer before the evening meal.

The storm broke a few minutes later, not abruptly, but with autumn gentleness, only to increase, as time went on, to all the fury of a mid-winter gale. It began with the approach of several "best friends," headed by Dan, who insisted upon "having one" with him. Sandy does not quite remember how, or when, it ended.

What was not attended to in the way of pre-nuptial celebrations was not Dan's fault, nor that of his chief coadjutor, Carlton. It was only when invention and the hours of the night gave out, that the thirst for revenge was satisfied. The supposed groom-elect was put through a series of ceremonies compared to which the initiation into a college fraternity is a paltry affair. They began with the "appetizer," followed by a series of toasts, more or less felicitous, concerning the approaching change in Sandy's life, the knowledge of which he had so basely concealed from his friends.

These were merely annoying, but the sequence of inquisitorial acts which ensued laid low the unfortunate victim. Brief intervals were accorded him in which to divulge the name of the lady, and the day and hour of the

happy event, but these only served to render him dumb, and to give him renewed strength and obstinacy for the next onslaught. From hair-raising experiences in the elevator shaft he passed to the consumption of obnoxious mixtures of food, and thence to blanket-tossing, in bewildering succession. But daylight found his persecutors even more weary and sore-limbed than he. In Club annals Sandy still holds the record for endurance among numerous competitors in pre-nuptial celebrations for bridegrooms-elect. There are those who still discuss this marvelous night, but until time had somewhat dimmed its glory in the minds of the participants, its hero was seen no more at the Club.

Giorgio had never before been favored with the grim look which was on his benefactor's face when the latter presented him with the much-desired "certificato" the following evening. He feared for Mr. Sandy's health, and made solicitous enquiries, only to be told to "go to hell with his damned certificate!" This grieved Giorgio extremely, and the memory of his stricken face, the soft brown eyes full of tears, returned and kept Sandy awake during the early morning hours.

For some time after this he saw no more of Giorgio. Casual enquiries disclosed the

fact that the boy was giving satisfaction in his latest position.

"There's nothing wonderful about his business ability," his employer stated; "but he'll do. You can't help liking the kid."

Sandy also had one or two confidential chats with Carlotta's fruit-monger uncle. Apparently the "certificato" had done its work, and both the "many friends of Carlotta," and the uncle were satisfied to accept its white and gold-framed affirmation of something into which it were wise not to enquire too deeply.

So in due time there came a tiny, dark-eyed daughter to Giorgio and Carlotta, and they were "verra happy."

Baby Maria was six months old when her father rushed frantically to Sandy's apartment one evening. "What to do? What to do?"

Carlotta's two big brothers from that conveniently far-distant country, had suddenly decided to abandon all former occupations, and come and establish themselves in the city. They had written that Carlotta was to keep house for them, and to throw the sum of her earnings in with theirs. Being her nearest male relatives they naturally assumed command of both her earnings and her services. Giorgio was incoherent in his distress.

Aside from having these rights over the person of Carlotta, the brothers were "Catholeeca," very "streecta" ones, at that. The girl's elastic conscience had allowed her to stray far away from the ministrations and powers of the church; not so the big brothers. Now they were about to descend upon them. "Dio Mio!" Giorgio's youthful person, his slender income, and above all, the white and gold-framed "certificato," would be considered but slight foundations for his permanent presence in the household, to say nothing of Baby Maria's.

The stability of matrimony in due form had at last presented itself to the young Italian's mind as a necessary and desirable thing. Carlotta, married, would naturally be in the sacred custody of her husband. The big brothers were expected to arrive within a week at the latest. Sandy was urged to provide, before the hour of their arrival, all the details of license, priest, ring, decorations, place of ceremony, and other customary features. The groom did not wish knowingly to eliminate any of these.

"And what about bridesmaids?" enquired the ironic Sandy, when a moment was vouchsafed him for speech; "and a ring-bearer? Too bad Maria is not yet walking! It would

hardly do for her to creep in with the ring, would it!" This was a statement, however, not a question. Fortunately Giorgio took it as such; one of the many in which he could not follow his "kinda frien'."

The thought of the little Maria creeping *anywhere* troubled the boy not a little. What place would she hold in the minds of the big brothers? Would they look at her, and then at the too-recently dated "certificato" with questions in their ruthless eyes? "Dio Mio!" He snatched up the tiny "joy of his heart" greedily. Nothing should harm her!

Sandy's mind, instead of his heart, took charge of the simple wedding ceremony. He cruelly over-rode all desires for elaborate details. Attendants, decorations, and festivities of any kind in which outsiders would be involved, were voted down by this adamant committee-of-affairs.

Three days before the unsuspecting big brothers arrived, the names and fortunes of Giorgio and Carlotta, and those of little Maria, were made one, according to the civil law, and that of the Roman Catholic Church.

The uncle gave away the bride, and Sandy, with many inward qualms, stood beside the handsome bridegroom. All went smoothly, the priest making no comments on Maria, pre-

sumably a neighbor's child, who tumbled about under foot. The only mishap was when she nearly swallowed the ring, when in his great perturbation, the best man dropped it.

Following the brief ceremony and a few words of admonition spoken by the busy parish priest, came the serving of cake, fruit, and wine, in the little back room of the fruit-monger's shop, Sandy's one concession to the Italian's love of a "festa." In this the priest urbanely joined them, while above the mantel the white and gold-framed "certificato" shone down in benediction. Fortunately the priest did not notice this, and presented a brand new one of the present date with much kindly feeling to the pretty bride. There were four persons present who devoutly hoped that the two big brothers would never delve too deeply into the discrepancies of parish register and white and gold-framed proof of the married state of Giorgio and Carlotta!

Life is full of these hazards, each one reasoned in his own or her own more or less enlightened way; not in these very words, but in inward conviction. The time has not yet come when Sandy has regretted his own share in the deed.

When the two big brothers arrived, confident of the parts they intended to play in Car-

lotta's future, they met with many surprises.

Their none too bright intellects found difficulty in coping with the combined forces arrayed against them. On the one hand were the fruit-monger uncle, and the "kinda frien', Mr. Sandy;" the first full of oily-tongued suavity, the latter inscrutable. On the other hand was the little family group of three, indisputably happy, and on their way to prosperity, as a visit to Giorgio's employer showed.

Thus were their plans for a city life completely reversed, and the services which their sister, Carlotta, was to render them as their due, they now found themselves rendering her, as members of the household over which she presided in true western fashion.

Over all shone the white and gold-framed "certificato," the very handsomest thing of its kind the big brothers had ever seen.

THE "MOVIE-FAN"

Early one evening Sandy was on his way to a second-hand bookshop in Fillmore street, where he loved to pioneer for literary treasures.

The sun was showing red through a bank of fog, the afternoon wind had died down, and the voices of children shouting in their play were to be heard all over the "Western Addition."

Where were the parents of these unattached young people? As he wondered Sandy's attention was attracted to a probable mother, one of a jostling line serpentineing toward the box-office window of a moving-picture house. She was a young woman, one of a group of three flashily dressed, gum-chewing, giggling persons, who were consumed with mirth over Sandy's efforts to make his way through the line. Fixing her with a solemn gaze which only increased her hilarity, he passed on, only to encounter further hindrances.

It was with difficulty that he avoided seri-

ously interrupting some of the children's games through which he and other pedestrians were forced to pass. Motor horns and street-car bells honked and clanged warningly, miraculously sparing many young lives cast recklessly in the way of traffic.

A hoidenish little girl of ten, her pretty, fair hair tossing about from under a bright Tam-O'-Shanter, collided with Sandy as he rounded a street corner. The impact jarred them both, and if he had not caught her arm and steadied her she would have rolled under the wheels of an oncoming automobile.

"Aw, lemme go!" she panted, struggling to free herself. "Jimmy's it! No fair—no fair!"

The game was a combination of "tag" and "one-foot-off-the-gutter," it later developed, and Jimmy, prize gamester of the neighborhood, was in close pursuit. It meant serious work when Jimmy was "it."

"Just calm down now, there's no hurry," advised Sandy. "Don't you know this street corner isn't a playground?"

By this time Jimmy had arrived, wide-eyed, and panting also.

"Say, Mister, she ain't done nothin'," he assured the serious-eyed stranger, who, for all he knew, might be a private "cop."

Jimmy's toes were peeping through his boot tips, and his face was far from clean, but one could see at a glance that his heart was in the right place.

Sandy kept a firm grasp on the little girl's struggling hand, and took in all the details of delicate features, slender figure, and fairly tasteful, well-made clothes. Where could her mother be to turn such a child loose in the streets at this late hour, the center of a crowd of rowdy youngsters?

"I want to talk to this young lady," said Sandy. "Oh, I won't hurt you!" he added more gently. "You may come too." He nodded to Jimmy.

Seeing no help for it, the girl walked along beside him quietly. Sandy felt the firmness of her hand and step, and there was no sign of either timidity or fear in the clear eyes. "She's a game one," he thought.

The few among the busy crowd who had noticed the encounter, dispersed, and the three walked slowly on, the boy, Jimmy, dropping a step or so behind the other two. At first the little girl was disinclined to talk, and every now and then jerked her hand suddenly, in the hope apparently of giving this strange captor the slip, but Jimmy's reassuring

presence soon caused her to resume her customary nonchalance.

After a few questions concerning her name, home, and other details, and receiving no answer, Sandy diplomatically turned the one-sided conversation into general lines, remarking casually on a moving picture billboard which they were passing.

"Um-hm. Ma's in there, I guess," vouchsafed the child, taken off her guard. "Or—or—maybe she isn't. I guess this is the night she goes to the 'California.'"

"Is your mother a movie-fan?" asked Sandy quietly.

"*She is not!* My mother's a nice lady."

"You bet she is!" proclaimed a loyal voice in the rear.

"I'm sure she is," responded Sandy gravely. "All mothers are nice."

It was fortunate for him that he did not glance around at this moment and catch the contemptuous gleam of Jimmy's eyes. What a fool this gent must be to think all mothers "nice!" He couldn't have seen some of the ones in Jimmy's alley, that was sure!

"She goes to movies every night most," boasted the little girl.

"Doesn't she ever take you?"

"Um-hm, sometimes. And sometimes my

daddy comes and takes me too, but it's awful long since he did."

This sounded like a divided family. "Doesn't Daddy live at home?" ventured Sandy.

"Nope, not all the time—not—what d'ye want to know for?" Her bright, child eyes regarded him roguishly.

Sandy felt duly reprimanded. "It's none of my business, is it?" he said pleasantly, winning her immediately by his kindly tone. "You see, you look like somebody I know, and I thought you might be his little girl."

This was the truth, although Sandy was blest if he could place the man at the moment. "Now, you're a nice-looking little girl, and you look as though you had a pretty name."

"Marjorie Manning, *some* name, better'n Mary Pickford," volunteered the voice in the rear.

"Say, Jimmy, you shut up! Who asked you to talk?" demanded Mary Pickford's rival.

"Aw, I ain't said nothin'."

"Don't be too hard on Jimmy," counseled Sandy, siding with the abashed, snub-nosed boy, whose pride was great, he could see, in his acquaintance with Marjorie.

"Manning! Why, of course! Does Dad's front name happen to be Peter?"

"Um-hm, and we live here," announced Marjorie, stopping in front of one of the many shoddy apartment-houses in that vicinity.

"Peter Manning used to have better taste than this," thought Sandy, glancing over the house. "Well, you run in and tell your daddy that two gentlemen brought you home, and that it's too late for a little girl like you to be playing 'tag' on the street."

"It was 'one-foot-off-the-gutter,'" corrected the other "gentleman," feeling keenly his oneness with Sandy.

Marjorie eyed the latter condescendingly, feeling sorry for his ignorance. "My daddy isn't hardly *never* home, what d'ye s'pose? I don't want to go in alone."

"Well, play around here then, it's quieter. Don't you know that you very nearly didn't come home at all?" Sandy could not help asking this, his heart hardening toward all irresponsible parents, and those of this attractive child in particular.

"No, why didn't I?"

"Never mind; you're safe home now, and mind you stay here."

"I like you," she confided unexpectedly,

slipping her hand again into his. "I don't know your name."

A lump rose in Sandy's throat. He hated to acknowledge it, but it was rather pleasant to be liked by Marjorie.

"My name doesn't matter," he answered somewhat gruffly; the lump was in the way. Then a thought struck him, and he fumbled in his pocket for a card. It would do no harm to recall himself to Peter Manning.

"You may give this to your dad the next time you see him. Good-night, and mind you wait here for your mama."

"Good-night," both children mumbled indifferently. Their minds were too intent upon deciphering the name of the queer man to waste time on polite superfluities. The card was a business one, showing in one corner the name of a small hotel in Geary street, where for a short time Sandy was filling the position of night-clerk to oblige a friend.

Looking back when he reached the next street he could see the two children seated obediently on the steps of the apartment-house, their heads still bent in speculation over the card. Ten minutes later the incident had passed from his mind, and a heap of dusty books occupied his whole attention.

One morning the following week, Peter

Manning left his card in the office of the hotel. Sandy, at that hour, was sleeping. Under threat of hanging, no one was allowed to disturb him by either knock or telephone call. There was only one exception to this rule. The Blue-Eyed Lady, by a certain magic she held over the wire, could call him at any hour of the twenty-four.

When Sandy found Manning's card a few enquiries satisfied him that he would call again. He did call within the week, this time in the early evening, and with him came a dainty, upright little figure, carrying a small, new suitcase.

"Hello, hello, who's this?" exclaimed Sandy, turning from a tiresome complainant at the desk to a full view of the father and daughter. "How are you, Pete? Where've you been all this time?"

"In hell," answered Peter Manning.

"And now we've come to live with you," announced Marjorie joyfully.

"Is that so? Where did you get that stuff?"

"My daddy said so."

"Oh, he did? Well—when do you think of coming?"

"Right *now*, I said! I've got all my clothes in my suitcase—well, not quite all, but enough

to do me for a few days, my daddy says, till he can buy me some more. I'm going to have all new ones because he don't want—"

"That will do, Marjorie," interrupted her father. "Little girls shouldn't talk so much. The truth is," turning to Sandy, "Marjorie and I thought we'd move down here for a short time. Things aren't going just as we like them at home—you and I'll discuss this later. Right now I'd like two connecting rooms, if you've got 'em. This seems like a pretty decent joint. Quiet, isn't it, and respectable, and all that?"

"Perfectly," Sandy assured him solemnly.

"All right; show us what you've got. It's about time the kid was turning in."

Within the hour the two were settled in some pleasant, fourth-story rooms, and an excited little girl was trying her best to go obediently to sleep, her mind altogether absorbed by the delightful adventure of living in a down-town hotel with her daddy. He, meanwhile was giving Sandy the "dope" on this move of his.

Sandy had never known much about the domestic life of Peter Manning.

The friendship, begun man-fashion in some smoking-room or eating-place, had continued spasmodically for several years. Then

Manning had vanished from the customary haunts. Now, it seemed, the marriage which had taken place twelve years ago, was on the verge of wreck. Having been obliged to travel for his business firm, the husband could spend only a week or so each month in his home. The wife, pleasure-loving from the first, had grown more and more careless of home ties and responsibilities. Her claims on him financially grew more exacting, her tastes more extravagant, until the world now, for her, had become one huge pleasure palace, with the "movie" holding first place in her fancy. Marjorie, meanwhile, roved the streets at will. The mother's pride in the child's looks prompted her to keep her fairly well clothed, although at time most unsuitably, various "screen favorites" being used as models both for fashions and manners.

"In short," wound up Manning, "I've decided to cut the whole thing. She's not fit to bring up a child, so she shan't have her. I stood all sorts of things two or three years ago for Marjorie's sake, but it was no life for a child, to hear all the quarreling that went on, so I lit out for some months and gave the woman a chance. She said she could manage all right if I'd cut out, so I did. Supported 'em, of course, but kept away. Then what do

I find when I come back to see my little girl? Her mother at a damned show every night, the child running loose on the street for any stranger to pick up. It—it—was you opened my eyes to that, damn you! That cut deep, old man, I tell you!”

“It was true, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, that’s why it cut so deep, and that’s why we’re here now. Nobody could do what you did for my child the other night and not be fond of children, and we’ve come—”

“You’re away off,” declared Sandy. “Somebody’s been giving you a fill. I don’t remember doing anything.”

“That’s your way of putting it, but just the same, the children told me a pretty straight story of the other evening, and how —”

“Children? What children?”

“Why, my little Marjorie and Jimmy, don’t you remember him—little—”

“Oh, *Jimmy!*” exclaimed Sandy vaguely. “Little snub-nosed gentleman with a specialty for ‘One-foot-off-the-gutter!’ ”

“Yes, that’s Jimmy,” laughed Manning ruefully. “He’s a specimen of my little girl’s companions picked up on the street. Lucky for her that Jimmy is the fairly wholesome little chap that he is! Now, I thought of liv-

ing here for awhile—there's a school with a good class of youngsters up here half a dozen blocks—and I thought you could easily keep an eye on her going in and out afternoons, and—”

“And when you're out of town—what?” Sandy cannily led him on, amazed at the guileless assurance of the man.

“Oh, I'm away now only three or four days on a stretch! Nothing much can happen in that time.”

“No, nothing *much*,” agreed Sandy with emphasis.

He allowed Manning to reel off his plans for the immediate future without protest. It appeared to comfort him, and gave Sandy an opportunity of deciding what he, himself, believed the proper course to pursue. For Sandy had determined upon one thing early in the conversation, and his future course in the matter was to be based upon it. He was not going to be turned into a day-nursery for any man's child, no matter how attractive or needy!

So when Peter Manning reached the end of all explanations and requirements Sandy told him this mildly, but with absolute finality. A week or so, yes, that might be considered, while other arrangements were being

made, but to nothing further would he commit himself. Good Lord, did Manning think he had taken a post-graduate course in kindergartens?

No, Manning had not given that phase of the question much thought. Sandy would be well paid for any extra trouble, if that was what he meant.

It was plain to be seen that when the matters of food, clothing, and sleeping quarters were settled nothing else seemed left, to Manning's mind, in the life of an energetic, many-sided girl-child save a little habit of "playing around on the street." Sandy, with one eye on his hotel patrons, and the other on Marjorie's entrances and exits, might easily accomplish all the duties of "watch-dog."

"Sort of a cross between a foundling-asylum matron and a policeman. Good Lord!" complained Sandy.

Manning expressed the opinion that Sandy was taking the matter too seriously. "Sleep on the idea tonight," he suggested; "then, of course, if you really object, why I suppose I'll have to look around for something else—but Marjorie has taken such a fancy to you—I —"

"It's my business not to sleep at night," Sandy reminded him, "and when I do sleep I

prefer a good mattress." Then he turned away to answer an enquiry.

It was annoying of Manning to put the matter that way. All the time Sandy talked with the person at the desk he seemed to feel a soft, determined little hand tugging at his, and caught the gleam of joyous eyes. So the reason he was rather short with the person who was engaging a "room with bath" was because his heart was softening most exasperatingly.

Peter Manning stood over by the big, plate-glass windows looking out at the passing crowd. Sandy watched him during the next ten minutes while people came and went. Manning was a good fellow—it was a darned shame that a woman could break up a man's life like that! Oh, hang it, perhaps he could help him a bit!

Manning strolled up again to the desk, his cigar cold, and leaned against the counter railing.

"Oh, all right!" exclaimed Sandy, goaded past endurance. "I suppose I can undertake the job for a week or so; but that's the limit, understand?"

But the limit was not then in view, as he found later.

The following morning Marjorie's visions

of a life of leisure and continuous window-shopping were ruthlessly dispelled by a determined father.

At eight-thirty the two set forth for the nearby school; and that evening Manning reported that the child had been satisfactorily entered in the sixth grade, with a "dandy teacher, and that was all there was to it!"

Sandy was relieved to find that the matter was so easy, and indeed it all appeared so. For several days he saw little of them. Manning seemed intent upon becoming acquainted with his little girl, and out of school hours they were constantly together.

Marjorie always had a bright greeting for Sandy when passing in and out, and each evening she had some gay recital of the afternoon's pleasure for his ears—a donkey ride in the park, a scamper on the beach—or some other outdoor treat.

"And no movie?" Sandy once asked her.

"No; my daddy says I must love outdoors. There's prettier pictures there." A puzzled look came into the child's eyes. "Do you know, he called my mother what you did."

"What's that?"

"A 'movie fan.' What is that, Mr. Sandy?"

Sandy pondered. "I asked you if she was

one," he temporised. "I didn't know her, you see. You know what a fan is, don't you?"

Marjorie nodded. "Something you wave to keep you cool, *I* know! It's not a flag, but —"

"Yes, I can see that you know. It keeps you cool, that's just it. Your daddy wants you to keep nice and cool outdoors, while your mama keeps cool, or thinks she does, at the movies, eh?" Sandy was proud of himself.

"Yes, I see." Marjorie nodded, quite satisfied.

So all went smoothly for four days. Then Manning received a hurry call on a country order, and took the evening train for Sacramento to be away for an indefinite time, leaving a tearful little girl in the arms of a protesting guardian.

It took considerable diplomacy and an hour or so of story-telling before the child could be induced to go to her room and settle down for the night. All hints referring to the pleasures of playing assistant night-clerk were frowned down by Sandy, and finally, when at eleven-thirty a peep through the crack of her door discovered a sleeping Marjorie, worn out with conflicting emotions, he, no less weary, returned to his night's work.

With commendable forethought breakfast

for the child had been arranged for at a nearby waffle kitchen, to be eaten under the chaperonage of the good-natured, stout proprietress well-known to Sandy. His plans ended there, and it was not until he awoke with a start at noon on the following day that Marjorie's necessity for lunching and also dining, slapped his memory.

He rose hastily, thereby giving himself a headache, and descended to the office.

"Have you seen Marjorie this morning?" he asked Wainwright, the day-clerk.

"Nope. Oh, yes—yes, saw her go out to breakfast about eight."

"Is that all?"

"A crowd came in on the eight-thirty. I guess I missed her when she left for school. She's all right; *you* should worry!"

Sandy tried to agree with this, but after all, his was the responsibility, not Wainwright's. He was starting upstairs again when Wainwright remembered more about Marjorie.

"A lady called about ten-thirty to see her," he remarked casually.

Sandy started. "A lady! What lady?"

"Didn't leave her name."

Sandy returned quickly to the desk. "What did she look like? What did she say?"

Wainwright, surprised into giving details, tried to remember. "Sort of a 'fluffy-ruffles, movie fan,' I guess. Began by asking some questions about the show there." He indicated a moving-picture poster displayed in the lobby. "Then she looked over the register awhile."

Sandy groaned.

"Say, what's the matter?" demanded the other. "There ain't no law against a woman's looking at a hotel register, is there?"

"No, no, of course not!" Sandy was forced to admit. "What next?"

"She didn't seem much interested, but she did ask if Mr. Manning and his daughter were to remain here long, and where the little girl was."

"And of course you told her!"

"Yes, I did!" snapped Wainwright. "If you're so particular about your pet you'll have to stay on the job yourself."

This was unreasonable of the day-clerk, who did not know how much was involved in the apparently casual enquiry of the lady. "What's it to you?" he wound up more amiably, seeing plainly that something was wrong.

"That probably was the child's mother, and she's trying to get her back again. Now

I've promised Peter Manning that she shan't have her—not while he's away, at any rate."

"You're in for a sweet scrap," said Wainwright, surveying Sandy with commiseration. "Why, in hell, didn't you warn me? How could I know?"

"I never looked for anything like this."

"Why, saving your presence, any fool might have known that the woman would search the hotel and boarding-house registers. Nothing could be simpler."

"So it seems," agreed Sandy.

At three o'clock he impatiently looked out for a lightly-running little figure returning from school, but none came. It was past six when Marjorie appeared in the office doorway, a trifle doubtful as to her reception. With impatience in his heart Sandy smiled encouragingly.

"Well?" he enquired, pointing silently up at the solemn office clock.

"I know—I did—promise Daddy to come straight home from school," stammered the child; "but—but Mama came to school for me, and—" her eyes glistened as she warmed to her subject—"and she took me to see 'The Price of her Soul.' Oh, it was perfectly grand, Mr. Sandy!"

"Yes, I'm sure it was." His tone was not convincing.

"Don't you like movies, Mr. Sandy?"

"Oh, yes, I adore them! I think they're *cute*," he assured her. "Now run away and get ready for dinner. It's time to eat."

"Yes, I must hurry. My mama's coming after dinner to talk to you."

"What's that?"

"I said my mama's coming—"

"Good Lord! I heard you. Hurry up!"

Marjorie scampered to the elevator, pondering over the vagaries of the middle-aged, and in ten minutes was down again, bathed and brushed, ready for the evening meal.

When Mrs. Peter Manning, flashily, but most becomingly, "dressed to kill," sauntered into the hotel lobby that evening she encountered at the desk an entirely different person from the affable gentleman of the morning. A half-dozen or more persons were sitting quietly about in rocking-chairs. The determined-looking man, turning over some records behind the counter, glanced up enquiringly, and realised immediately who the woman was. She smiled confidently, and Sandy inwardly cursed heredity which had passed on a bit of that smile to the child Marjorie. He had an annoying remembrance of

the smile quite aside from its sweetness on Marjorie's lips. In the back of his brain was an exasperated query—where had he seen the woman before?

"I'd like to see Marjorie Manning," demanded her mother.

"Sorry, but she has retired."

"Oh, then, I'll just run up to her room!"

"She is asleep, and guests are not shown upstairs at this hour unless by invitation."

"But I am a very intimate—why, Marjorie was out with me all afternoon. I—"

"Yes," answered Sandy sternly; "that was expressly against her father's orders. It must not happen again."

"Who are you, I should like to know, to tell me what I shall or shall not do with my own child!" exclaimed the woman angrily.

Several men looked up curiously from their evening papers. Sandy hushed her loud tones by a glance, and a lowering of his own voice.

"So you are Mrs. Manning?"

"Yes, and I have a right to see my own child! I'd like to know what right you have to prevent me?"

"The right her father gave me when he left town last night, and I intend to carry out his wishes."

"Oh, you do?" she defied, starting for the elevator.

"Yes," declared Sandy, motioning to the keenly interested office-boy who promptly closed the elevator doors.

"Now," continued Sandy, standing on the lowest tread of the stairs; "I advise you to go home, Mrs. Manning, and think over this matter seriously before doing anything rash. You are not going to see Marjorie if I can prevent it until her father returns. Then, of course, it will be a question for him to decide."

"Him to decide! *Him* to decide!" repeated the angry woman. "Anybody'd think I, her own mother, had nothing to do with her! I'll just have you know—"

"Shuh! I don't think it's worth while making a scene," advised Sandy. "It would be very easy for me to report you at this hour of the evening."

In truth, an officer of the law, fingering his club importantly, as though itching for combat, was at that moment passing the plate-glass windows. Sandy nodded toward him significantly.

Mrs. Manning flushed still more angrily, seeing the futility of pressing the matter at present. Sandy, watching her intently, thought how easily she could be mistaken for

an undesirable visitor of the night, and how, had he so wished, he could turn the scales against her.

She paled, and tossed her head carelessly, laughing with strident tones, and then Sandy mentally placed her. He remembered a line of people edging up to a moving-picture box-office, and he felt again the ridicule of three empty-headed young women.

"I'll be around in the morning," she announced, for the edification of the occupants of the rocking-chairs and the elevator-boy, who had cautiously opened the doors again. "I was on my way to the show up here, so I thought I'd drop in. Tell Marjorie I was here, please. Good-night."

"Good-night," responded Sandy civilly, opening the street door, and allowing the "movie-fan" to sweep past him; that is, if skirts so short that they displayed several inches of flesh-colored stockings could be correctly said to sweep.

Then began one of the most exacting weeks of Sandy's existence, when evenings of work were interlarded with story-telling orgies, frequently interrupted by impromptu games of "hide-and-seek," when always the same irate, highly-colored woman was "it." A week during which his morning's repose was

restless and uncertain, broken by thoughts of the possible abduction of his little charge.

Marjorie was now under the strictest orders to return to the hotel for lunch, and after school on the stroke of dismissal. After her breakfast with her guardian, Tom, the office-boy, thought it great fun to see her safely into the school-yard. Many and circuitous were the routes they took to elude the "swell dame" in case she tried to make a capture in the street.

At noon, Sandy, cutting short his hours of rest, was ready for her to lunch with him. Three o'clock found him walking toward the school to meet her with some plan for the afternoon.

Late each day a gaily-dressed woman walked up and down past the hotel, ostensibly examining theatre-posters, to disappear for an hour or so into any one of the numerous motion-picture houses in the vicinity.

Each evening she sat in the hotel lobby, occupied with newspapers or "vanity bag," impatiently tapping her high-heeled, high-priced shoes on the tessellated floor; but a pretty, fair-haired little girl never appeared in the office during that time.

Sandy sat at the desk; and the elevator-boy, seeming to be in his complete confidence,

worked, one might say, on the same spring. Evening after evening the lady sat there, until the game grew irksome, and the policeman, patrolling outside, appeared a menace to which her courage was not equal.

Then, all unknown to Mrs. Peter, the second week of Manning's absence proved to be vacation week at school, and, resultant of one of Sandy's inspirations, Marjorie was spirited across the bay, and into the home of the Blue-Eyed-Lady, who welcomed the chance to help in this interesting bit of life's patchwork.

While her mother, outwitted, sat tapping her impatient heels in the hotel lobby, Marjorie spent seven ecstatic days and seven restful nights, quite out of the reach of city temptations and "movie fans."

At the end of two weeks when Peter Manning returned, there was a reckoning one evening. Marjorie had been brought back to the hotel that afternoon, and an exceedingly excited young person greeted her father when at six o'clock he hurried in.

During the dinner hour and for some time later there was no conversation save glowing descriptions from Marjorie, drawn out by her father's interested questioning, concerning her wonderful vacation week.

Sandy, who sat by attending to his work,

was strangely abstracted, Manning thought. Seated with his back toward the entrance he could not see what Sandy saw—a gaudily-dressed woman sauntering by with the evening crowd, who, when she saw the father and child intent upon each other, moved quickly out of sight. Sandy caught the expression of satisfaction on her face.

The piece of his mind which he presented to Peter Manning later, after the child had been sent upstairs, was a large one, forcible and highly-colored, so that the giving and receiving of it lasted far into the early morning hours. In consequence of this, within another week, Marjorie found herself safely, but unhappily, ensconced in a highly-recommended boarding-school for young ladies in a suburban town across the bay.

Marjorie never knew that the Blue-Eyed Lady had a hand in this, otherwise she might have most unfairly hated her. There, despite copious tears, and frequent protestations in the form of ill-spelt letters both to her father and “Mr. Sandy,” she remained for several months.

Meanwhile, legal proceedings for the separation of the parents were pending. Terms concerning the child could not be agreed upon, and contentions daily grew more

bitter. As Sandy refused to take any part in these discussions he really knew little about them. On one point he was firm however.

"No compromises," he commanded, "if you're asking *me*!"

Manning thought this the right idea. "I'm doing this solely for the sake of the child," he stated. "I shall marry again as soon as possible in order to have a decent mother for her." This appeared to him an entirely disinterested and heroic stand.

Sandy eyed him quizzically. "Going to step out of one mistake into another, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'd let well enough alone if I were you. That's my advice. Now I'm done, but don't come prating to me about getting another mother for Marjorie!"

This was one of Sandy's busy evenings, when Manning's affairs bored him extremely. Those upon which he was even more bored were the ones when Mrs. Peter Manning chose to come and air her grievances, and flaunt her wounded maternal feelings in his unresponsive face. These ran through the whole gamut of emotions from the softly alluring feminine to the nobly heroic. The woman haunted both his waking and his sleeping hours. No nightmare was complete without her. Event-

ually the interest, and then the suspicion, of the occupants of the office rocking-chairs became aroused. It was noticed that a bond of some sort, whether agreeable or not they could not judge, existed between this frequent visitor and the quiet night-clerk.

Suddenly her visits ceased. A pleasant void was left in the office one evening, followed by another and still another. Weeks went by, and the woman did not come again. Peter Manning gave up his rooms, and for several months thereafter Sandy would have lived in peace of mind, had it not been for the arrival at frequent intervals of tear-stained, ink-spotted letters from the young ladies' seminary across the bay. These he usually answered. When he did not they only came oftener, causing him much anguish of soul, which he crushed down under a calm exterior, and assured himself sternly that it was none of his affair.

But Fate would not let him off so easily. His life lines were still entangled with those of the Mannings. Once a week Sandy's evening off occurred, when the day-clerk took his place for a few hours, and the night-clerk could then dine and use his evening after the manner of the ordinary mortal. It did not please him on one of these evenings to have

the voice of Peter Manning over the wire urge him to meet him somewhere for dinner.

"Are you sure there's to be no party?" demurred suspicious Sandy.

"Nix! No party," Manning assured him.

"All right," agreed Sandy promising himself several quiet hours after dinner. "I'll meet you for a quiet feed. Where's it to be?"

"Come up here to my room," suggested the other, giving his apartment number. "I'm not quite ready to go out; we'll decide later."

Half an hour after, when Sandy arrived at the place of meeting, he was much displeased to find a lively young woman, evidently ready for an evening's pleasure, waiting with Manning in the reception-hall.

To cover the strained situation the latter chatted with much volubility and impressively presented his friend to the young lady, opening Sandy's eyes to the fact that this was probably the prospective new mother of his little friend Marjorie. So Sandy's heart hardened more and more toward any idea of diversion in the coming dinner, and toward the young woman, innocent though she might be; and most of all toward Peter Manning.

"Let's go down to Charley Fashion's—how's that?" suggested the jovial host.

"Any place where there's food," assented Sandy gruffly, wondering profanely why he had been chosen to play "gooseberry" in this party which *was* no party! The young woman evidently wondered also, not very well pleased with the arrangement.

"Well, come along," hurried Manning, leading the way toward the entrance.

Just then the telephone at the lobby desk rang, and the attendant, answering, called to him: "It's for you, Mr. Manning."

With a gesture of impatience he left Sandy and his companion waiting on the doorstep while he answered the summons, whence they heard only snatches of an unwilling conversation on his part. While they discussed the present fog, which might by tomorrow turn to rain, and other vital topics, Manning wrestled with an unwished-for appointment.

Finally they heard him say: "Oh, all right then! I'll come up for you; be there in ten minutes."

He stood a moment after hanging up the receiver, his handsome face drawn with a mingling of annoyance and pain. Then he rejoined the two in the doorway.

"Sorry! I'm detained for a few minutes. Look here, you two go over to Charley's and

get a table. I'll be along in about ten minutes."

"All right," agreed Sandy, with all the appearance of dealing with a lunatic. Little did Manning know what risks he was running!

"Ten minutes, mind!" warned the young woman archly.

"Sure! Ten minutes, Mabel," and Manning disappeared up the street.

It was fully half an hour later, when Sandy and the young woman called Mabel, having secured a table for three, and having exhausted all topics of conversation which their limited common ground held, looked up hopefully to behold a couple entering who proved to be Mr. and Mrs. Peter Manning.

Events passed rapidly and bewilderingly after Manning with assumed nonchalance had presented his wife. The unwelcome dinner invitation and the still more unwelcome guests weighed more and more heavily upon Sandy's spirits. His depression did not have the slightest effect upon the spirits of the ladies. Although total strangers to each other, with true feminine guile, and utterly irrespective of what their feline attitude might be toward each other on the morrow, they were to all intents and purposes the dearest of friends. Manning was fooled by this pleas-

ant atmosphere. Not so Sandy. He retreated still further into his shell of ironic indifference. This mood was received with much pretended amusement by Mrs. Manning. She saw a possible flirtation along these lines—a way to bring her husband to terms. “I’ll just show him!” she thought; and began to spread her net for the wary Sandy.

For a time she kept her head, but an hour or so of highly-seasoned food, wine, and brilliant lights, changed her tactics from ones mildly annoying to those exceedingly distasteful.

“Say, d’ye know,” she whispered, coquettishly touching Sandy’s wine-glass with her own, “it would be fun to make old Pete jealous, wouldn’t it?”

“Is that your idea of fun?”

“Um-hm. You men are all alike. It’s dead easy to make ’em jealous. Say, are you game?”

“Sure, I’m game, but not your kind of a game,” answered Sandy.

Meantime, Manning’s attentions were apparently all devoted to Mabel, yet he was not blind to the maneuvers of his partially divorced wife.

These were not having the desired effect as planned by Mrs. Manning, for instead of

creating jealousy in her whilom husband's mind, and regret over lost claims to her charms, they were merely arousing a mistaken indignation and contempt for his ill-used friend.

Mabel's suspicions, influenced by his own, were also sent in this direction; although secretly, as one woman to another, her real venom was directed toward the wife, who, she could plainly see, was fighting with these ill-concealed weapons to regain what she considered her own.

Various rumors, put aside at the time as nonsense, recurred now to Manning, of the evenings passed by his wife in the lobby of Sandy's hotel.

Had they been idle rumors? Would she have gone there evening after evening merely to make her claims on Sandy's sympathy? She must have received encouragement for her visits. Manning flattered himself that he knew men pretty damned well. One always had to look out for these quiet, self-contained chaps! Coming to this conclusion, Manning rose abruptly, when two hours of this ill-assorted companionship had brought them all to the verge of weariness.

"Time to call this party off," he announced. "Sorry, but I've got a business ap-

pointment at nine. I couldn't get out of it." He met his companion's look of surprise unflinchingly, putting aside as forgotten the "show" spoken of earlier in the evening. "I have time to take you home, Mabel. Just oblige me by seeing Mrs. Manning home, will you, Sandy? You and she seem to have plenty to talk about!"

They left the restaurant, as many parties do, rather the worse for having entered it, and Sandy, still grimly "game," though not the game of Mrs. Manning, called a taxi-cab for the highly jubilant, and now slightly intoxicated lady. Paying no attention to her inane chatter, he settled himself as comfortably as circumstances permitted in his half of the seat and soon became pleasantly absorbed in reflections of his own affairs, in which the person beside him played no part. A silence lasted for several minutes, his only conscious sensation being one of soothing relief. Then he began to wonder, and turning warily discovered his companion listing somewhat dangerously toward his shoulder, in what he thought was a sound sleep.

"Good thing, too!" he muttered. Diplomatically tilting her head in the other direction, he resumed his pleasant thoughts which

at that hour, as well as most other hours, reverted to the Blue-Eyed Lady.

The cabman had been given the name of a small uptown hotel of some pretensions. The jerk with which the cab drew up before it failed to arouse Mrs. Manning.

"We're here," announced Sandy; but she did not stir. He took hold of her arm and shook her gently. "Wake up, woman, you're home." To his horror, her head lolled back on the cushions, then over to one side. Her eyes, half open, rolled up in a peculiar way. Sandy had never seen eyes behave in just that way before. Her mouth dropped open in a silly fashion, and a gasp issued from it. Good Lord, what was this?

The cab-driver looked around and tapped impatiently on the glass.

"Here's your place! Two dollars, please."

"Look here!" cried Sandy. "I've got a fainting woman here. Lend me a hand, will you?"

The cabman lent disinterested, though practised, aid to the distracted Sandy, and a bell-boy, running out, completed a strangely assorted trio which, trying to make a three-cornered "Lady's chair," succeeded in landing a much-tousled form in the elevator. Fortunately few persons were in the lobby, and the

bell-boy, discreet of his kind, remembered the lady's room number, and with prompt intuition guided Sandy and his burden to it.

They laid her on the bed and threw open the windows. While the boy hastened for ice-water Sandy struggled with the intricacies of the lady's collar and hatpins. Incidentally he removed several curls with her hat, and would gladly have completed the scalping process had it been lawful.

After applying all the first-aid remedies of hand-rubbing, pulse-feeling, ice-on-temple, and others which occurred to their united minds, there seemed nothing more for them to do but wait for Mrs. Peter Manning to stop moaning and gasping, and to open her eyes. This she did quite suddenly after about an hour had passed, when Sandy's back was turned, arousing suspicions in him to which he allowed full play, until a real terror in her eyes assured him that the attack, at least, had not been feigned.

He smiled grimly. "You're here," he assured her.

"Here?" She looked about in a frightened way.

"Yes. They always ask 'Where am I?', don't they? Well, you're here, all right. Don't be frightened—I won't eat you!"

Then she remembered, and trying to assume a remnant of coquetry, struggled to a sitting posture. "Gee, that was some dinner! What's the idea? Have you been doping me?"

Sandy gazed at her for a full minute without speaking, gathering together the forces of his scorn. He motioned to the pitcher-eared bell-boy, and gave him a generous tip. "You may go. I think we're all right now. I'll ring if I want you."

The door closed behind the reluctant boy, then Sandy spoke his mind with great deliberation. "Now, cut that out, my lady, do you hear me?—*Cut that out!* You and I have come to a show-down, right here and now. I've stood all I'm going to stand from the Manning family, see?" A clear-eyed, smiling little face crossed his mental vision. He felt the pressure of a soft hand. "Although Marjorie—"

"Marjorie!" The figure on the bed huddled down again, and there came from it long, strangling sobs. "I can't give her up!" Sandy heard. "I'll do anything to get her—anything—anything! Help me to get her!"

Sandy gritted his teeth, and said "Damn!" to the million-trillion stars visible from the open window. He stood there and thought, while the tumult on the bed continued. He

hated gratuitous sermons preached by canting persons. When himself treated to even the suggestion of one from any over-zealous "up-lifter" he was quick to present an imaginary collection plate for contributions, indicating that the sermon was over. Thus it was much against his principles to preach himself (being keenly aware of his own weaknesses and failings) and it was a well-known statement of his that he would never again give advice to women!

So he remained at the window gazing at the stars, until the strangling sobs had done some good. His thoughts were not in the stars however. They could not help but hover round that soul-rending sight on the bed.

After all, what was she—that tousled little heap of—what was it Wainwright had called her? "Fluffy-Ruffles—Movie-Fan," that was it! A light-minded, frivolous, pleasure-loving nature left three-quarters of the time alone in a great city full of enticing by-paths. What wonder that our ill-balanced civilisation eventually casts these unfortunate bits of "fluff" into the moral dust heap!

The sobbing ceased, and Sandy turned away from the twinkling stars, his mind clarified.

No one but himself (and he has forgotten)

and Mrs. Peter Manning, knows what he said to her during the next half hour, and there was no one to pass around the collection plate. Sandy left then, after promising to call up Peter in the morning, and she had promised to try and get some sleep.

He did call Peter up, and the interview was stormy, though brief. The gist of it lay in Sandy's final sentence.

"You're a damn fool if you don't hang onto the mother you've already got for Marjorie. If it interferes with your business, why—drop your business! To hell with the whole lot of you!"

This so enraged Manning that he cut off abruptly, nearly electrifying "Central."

Hell was a pleasant place, to judge by what Sandy saw one evening about two weeks later. That morning he had received a curt note from Peter Manning saying that he and his wife had decided to try it again, and that he hoped Sandy would run out to see them sometime for Marjorie's sake. Sandy filed this note with an inscrutable smile, having doubts about a renewed intimacy with the Mannings.

That evening he bethought himself of his old friend, the second-hand book-dealer. It was some months since he had been to see

him. As it was his evening off, he walked briskly along the darkening streets toward the shop. Passing along Fillmore street, his mind reverted naturally to recent experiences. There was the moving-picture house now where he had first seen the "Movie-Fan." Approaching nearer he rubbed his eyes. In the center of the line now serpentineing toward the box-office window were three familiar figures, nay four, for freckled-face Jimmy, rendered almost unrecognizable in a new suit, was also of the party. Marjorie saw Sandy first, and broke away from her parents to run joyfully to him. Peter Manning looked rather sheepish, but his wife, woman-like, all smiles, adapted herself to the situation. Sandy felt in a great hurry, but Marjorie's soft hand held his.

"My daddy's going to stay home every night now," she announced joyfully; "and we're only going to movies sometimes, and—"

"Marjorie, you talk too much!" broke in her father sternly, yet he smiled, and Sandy, catching the smile, returned it.

"Come and see us soon!" cried Marjorie after him, and he nodded as he hastened on, to be absorbed a few minutes later in a brand-new consignment of dusty volumes that very day flung down in a corner of the book-shop.

PERTAINING TO THINGS SPIRITUAL

It was when Sandy was connected with the White Laundry Company and matters of religion were furthest from his thoughts, that he first became acquainted with the vicissitudes of the Johannsen family.

Jack, the office boy, called them to his attention.

America's participation in the great world war was a year old. The office staff was short of men, and replete with well-meaning young women. Sandy's work was multiplied by unexpected duties in all directions. Just now he was looking about for Jack. Where was the kid anyway? He had left at least two hours ago with a load of clean clothes. While Sandy wondered for the fifth time Jack hurried in, a small-sized parcel in his hands. The rule of no delivery without payment had been put in force.

"No pay, no clean clothes," was Jack's order. "You'd have left 'em though, I bet!" he assured Sandy. "Say, you'd oughter seen

that place. They didn't have a bean, I guess, and their furniture all bein' moved out, and everything."

"Whose furniture?" demanded Sandy, his ready interest aroused.

"Them Johannsens up on Jackson street, *you* know. Got a whole lot o' kids and no dough."

"Now I know just who you mean!" Sandy's sarcasm slipped easily away from Jack's comprehension.

"O' course I couldn't do nothin' but bring their bundle back," he explained. "But I wish you'd go out there yourself, I sure do!"

"Me? What next! Do you think I have time to deliver laundry bundles?"

"Well, you could do somethin' about it all right. I couldn't, you see."

Jack's earnestness eventually had the desired effect, and Sandy, a sigh directed toward his overflowing desk, shook himself from accounts and bills, and followed the boy.

They drove rapidly toward the Jackson street tenement where the Johannsen family lived, Jack explaining on the way.

"They've always paid before, but I don't see how they did. They ain't got much except kids."

The apparent truth of this statement was

noticeable when they arrived at their destination. Kids of the human species swarmed everywhere, up and down the narrow outside stairway, and tumbled over each other in the crowded hall through which two men were trying to carry some battered furniture without causing loss of life.

"Guess they don't all belong to the Johannsens," suggested Jack, dubiously eyeing the scene.

"I wouldn't be sure," Sandy replied skeptically.

At the top of the inner stairway a woman stood, a forlorn object in a sordid setting. A delicate lame boy of nine, and two younger girls, hanging about their mother, were showing the excitement of their ages at any unaccustomed change. The boy stood aloof, regarding his mother from time to time with anxious eyes.

As soon as Sandy saw her he remembered the beginning of this Johannsen family. He noted the full brown eyes of the woman, and the glossy dark hair, still abundant and gracefully knotted. Ten years ago he had seen her as a bride. He remembered her as Stella Garcia.

Old Garcia, her father, ran a saloon in Clay street in those days. The girl had tended

bar at times, and had always a pleasant word for Sandy when he had gone to collect the rent for his company each month. Their talk had run along curious lines when one thought of it. Queer for a man in his walk of life to talk over a saloon counter to a girl about her soul. Yet that was what had happened one day, and the girl had kept it up. Sandy remembered it all—and now! The stairway was dark, the two men were for the moment below, and he could make his survey deliberately before his presence became known.

Where was Olaf, the big longshoreman who had married Stella, he wondered. His gaze now penetrated beyond the group at the head of the stairs and through an open doorway. In the window opposite hung a home-made service flag. Sandy seemed to see a bit of a scarlet petticoat worn by the girl those dozen years ago. The flag displayed one blue star; so that accounted for Olaf.

Sandy's musing came to an abrupt conclusion. One of the handlers of furniture jostled him from below. "Here, let's pass! What more, missus? All this stuff?"

"It's all I have," she answered drearily. "Do you need to take it all?"

"Them's my orders," said the man, but he looked unwillingly at his task.

"You shan't take away my mother's bed!" declared a brave young voice, as the pale boy stepped forward with clenched fists and panting breath.

"Say, you keep out o' the way, kid," said the man roughly, though not unkindly.

"You'd best be quiet, Johnny," admonished his mother. "It's no use."

Sandy, moved to immediate action, gained the top of the stairway.

"Here, you leave the rest to me!" he commanded with an imperative gesture toward the astonished expressman. "I'll shoulder this job myself. You can refer your boss to me." He gave the man a card. "By the way, who is your boss? I mean, who sent you to do this dirty job?"

The man mentioned a well-known name to Sandy; one connected with various prosperous business firms for doing their unclean work on the side while attending to their published deeds of charity in the open.

"You tell him I'm on this job, see? And I'm onto him too!" The man grinned, yet was disinclined to give up so easily. "It's all right I tell you. Here—unload that stuff down there!" yelled Sandy to the second man, who had given up all idea of work for the day, and

had settled down on the doorstep among the crawling youngsters.

The two expressmen looked at each other. "Who pays for this job, boss?" enquired the one on the stairs.

"I'll see that you get paid tomorrow," vowed Sandy. "Now, vamoose! Skiddoo—*git!*"

"But my mother's bed, and—and—the cook-stove!" cried Johnny, anxiously peering down the stairway.

Sure enough! Sandy had noticed a bed forming the foundation for many smaller objects, already in the wagon. He rushed downstairs two at a time.

"Unload here, what are you about?" he demanded, roughly disturbing the lazy figure on the top step. In another fifteen minutes the furniture had all been carried up again. The expressmen worked under a sort of hypnotic spell, aided by enthusiastic Jack, who had known well enough what would happen when he had persuaded his busy superior to accompany him.

During all this time the woman and the two little girls had stood, wide-eyed and unquestioning, too stunned by the quick reversal of events to show any emotion. Adversity's rigid training had been effective; stolidity

was their predominant trait. They stood aside obediently when Sandy and Jack began moving their belongings back into the desolate rooms. There were three of these, fairly decent in their appointments, and with that service flag in the window, shot through with the late afternoon sun, stimulating their efforts, the two worked rapidly. Johnny manfully lent his aid, especially when it came to the setting up of "mother's bed." To the casual eye this appeared to be the sole place of repose for the entire family.

"Now," exclaimed Sandy, dusty-handed and breathless; "I think you'll do." He clapped Jack on the shoulder. "You may thank this chap for getting back your laundry bundle. He was keen for my bringing that, you bet you!"

She who had been Stella Garcia clutched the bannister rail still more tightly. Tears streamed from her closed eyes, and she moaned until the two little girls cried in sympathy.

"You've made my mother cry," said Johnny reproachfully; "but I guess you didn't mean to."

"We didn't!" protested Sandy. He and Jack half-carried the woman in and placed her in a chair. "She's all right, eh? *You are,*

aren't you?" he emphasized. The force of this brought her to a sitting posture with a faint smile on her face.

"Yes, I'm all right—sure I am. Be quiet, children. Ain't you got no sense? For shame, before the gentleman!"

"Indeed, I'm no gentleman!" declared Sandy. "Don't you remember me, Stella? How's your soul going these days?"

"Eh?" She looked up bewildered. "Why, of course! What a dub I am! It's Mr. Sandy!"

"That's who—wondering what had become of you, Stella. Why, I've seen this kid here day after day when we had the office yonder;" he indicated the opposite corner of a side street. "I've seen him at the window looking out at the other children at play. Why have you kept him shut in like that?"

"Johnny's never been strong-like. It was the drink Dad used to give him in the first years that took such a hold on him. He's never been like the other children. Then since Olaf's been gone—" She looked up at the service flag. The sun had left it dark and cold.

"Tell me about Olaf." Sandy looked at his faithless timepiece; just then it chanced to be going. "Gee whiz, it's closing time!

Chase back to the office, Jack; I can't do anything more there tonight."

Whereupon he settled down to hear about Olaf, and the many happenings of the intervening years since first he had talked to Stella Garcia about her soul and of things spiritual in general.

It had been a struggle from the first, she told him, to make both ends meet. A longshoreman's pay was small, and they had always been behind in the race. "I was often tempted to go back to the old life," sighed Stella.

"I don't blame you a bit. There's no grind like this damned respectability one!" Sandy was now off on his favorite hobby. Naturally his listener could not quite follow him.

"Yes, it's been a grind," she agreed. She told how the laming of little Johnnie had come to pass. He had been tossed about in a drunken brawl over her father's drinking counter. It is to punish deeds like this, thought Sandy, that millions of armed men go forth in the name of humanity and democracy, while in our midst—in our neighbors' houses—these things occur!

The little girls had always been healthier. She herself at times had been able to do factory work. Once, oh fortunate interval, she

had served in a restaurant for several months!

"It was you who helped me all the time," she surprised him with.

"Me?" Bewildered Sandy thought her mind must be wandering.

"Yes. You always told me to keep my head above my work. That very first day when you come in for the rent, you told me somethin' about my mind."

Sandy was nonplussed. "I must have been *some* fresh kid," he said lamely, ransacking his memory for a clue to her meaning.

"I never thought about my mind before," she went on; "sure I didn't. It wasn't my mind the men wanted that used to come round."

Then Sandy remembered—the swinging doors of a barroom closing behind him, the malodorous atmosphere of a water-front "joint." Few men were in the place at that hour, and those few were gathered around a pretty, brown-eyed girl. She was giving them tit for tat, yet holding them at bay. Seeing Sandy, she had turned with the same manner to him, but his business-like air had immediately caused her to change.

He had been impressed with her prompt methods. That day he had been dwelling

much in thought over the mastery of the mind. It was his way to take anyone who happened to converse with him into his theories concerning these things. "Keep your head above your work," he had advised the girl, and she had not known that she was merely the chance target for generalisation. It might have been one of the drunken brawlers, but it chanced to be Stella, who received and cherished the advice.

Thus it had been each time for succeeding months when he had called for the rent. From "head" they had advanced to "mind;" from "mind" to "soul;" thence to "spirit" and back again, until all unknown to Sandy he had implanted an altogether unique line of thought which had struggled on alone through the years. For after a time his work had changed, and he had occasion to go no more to the barroom. And now Stella, the bride, had become this worn woman! Good Lord, what a satirist old Time was, to be sure! Here sat Sandy now in company with the service flag, the woman, and the three ill-fed children.

He wondered what part he had played in keeping this group together. Evidently some word of his had lingered in the "mind" of the woman.

Realisation that it was time for the even-

ing meal, and that there were no signs of preparation for it suddenly came to him. Persons about to be evicted for non-payment of rent are not apt to have well-filled larders. He bade good-bye to the little group with the promise to look out for work for Stella, although he groaned inwardly as he wondered what a woman of her type could do.

Within another hour a well-filled basket of provisions had arrived at the tenement addressed to Mrs. Olaf Johannsen, with the assurance from the brisk messenger who deposited it at her door that until she became again self-supporting, the District Workers would keep her supplied with necessities from the Agency near by.

The following week found Stella established in the vast mangle room of the Laundry, and as Sandy observed her, coming and going regularly, he heaved a figurative sigh of relief, believing his responsibility in her direction ended.

Responsibility, it is true, may have ended, but the needs of an enquiring mind which he had unwittingly quickened into action were apparently never-ending.

At first the growing interest of the entire office staff in his association with Mrs. Johannsen escaped Sandy's notice. The regu-

larity with which she stored up questions to put to him on all sorts of subjects soon became a matter of much half-concealed mirth among his companions. It was not until he had been asked three successive weeks by one of his most secular young assistants which church he would advise him to attend the following Sunday, and another had asked him if he made a study of mind reading, and until even Jack had so far infringed upon his own idea of what was due the dignity of his superior as to ask him if he had a "soul-mate," that Sandy recognised some familiar reiteration in it all, and realised to what an extent he had become mentor to the woman whose existence he had for so many years completely forgotten.

Then his characteristic ire arose, and he inwardly vowed to put a stop to it. Being his "brother's keeper," or his sister's either, under compulsion, had no charms for Sandy. He forthwith surrounded himself with a baffling atmosphere of unresponsiveness which so bewildered the unsuspecting woman that several weeks passed while she ransacked the mind which he had awakened to discover in what way she had offended "Mr. Sandy."

Meanwhile the two little girls Johannsen romped and tumbled with the rest of the noisy children swarming up and down the tene-

ment steps. Pale little Johnny, too weak to join in their boisterous games, stood usually at the window looking down at them. Above him hung the faded service flag, mute reminder of a father who might never return. Sandy, walking home from work each evening, often passed that way. The picture stamped itself indelibly in his brain—the flag, already faded during its brief service of a few months, the boy's life, with its equally brief number of years, too surely fading also.

One afternoon the boy's face was absent from the window. The faded little flag alone caught the late sun rays. Sandy wondered, then crushed down his interest under sternly-made resolutions.

Next day about noon he was informed that Mrs. Johannsen had not reported in the mangle room that morning. The connection between Johnny's vacant place at the window and her absence was obvious, yet Sandy gave no sign. Someone else was deputed to attend to the woman's neglected work, while a mild oath or two was thrown in concerning the sex's irresponsibility. Several days went by.

"Say, there'll be a strike in the mangle room if you don't put another hand in there," was the report Sandy received one morning.

"Where's Mrs. Johannsen?" he enquired.

"Don't know."

"Well, make it your business to find out, somebody."

Somebody proved to be Jack. That same afternoon, he returned from his rounds looking much disturbed.

"What in hell's the matter?" demanded his office chief.

"Say, you know them Johannsens?"

"Yes, what about them?"

"The kid's dead."

The suddenness of this statement undermined a bit of Sandy's stoicism. "Eh, what's that?" he asked with some concern. Johnny's pale face rose before him.

"The little chap what wanted us to save 'mother's bed,' " explained Jack.

"Are you sure? Who told you?"

"Oh, all the other youngsters around!"

"Trust the kids for knowing," ruminated Sandy. "Well, he's best gone. What chance would he have had of surviving in the conflict!"

This was beyond Jack so he wisely stood silent. Simpler matters occurred to him. "I—I think it would be nice to take some flowers," he suggested shamefacedly. To make any show of sentiment, especially to the office manager, seemed out of place.

"Sure!" was Sandy's unexpectedly prompt rejoinder. "I'm with you. See what the others will do." He flipped a piece of silver into Jack's palm, and returned to his desk.

"She'd like it if you took 'em to him," was the boy's next suggestion.

"Me? Good Lord, I'm no florist's messenger!"

"Well, I guess she thinks you're more her friend than the rest of us."

"You're dead wrong, Jack. Get out and buy the flowers—pillow with 'rest' on it—'gates-ajar'—any old thing you like, but don't bother me again about it!"

Jack's reproachful eyes and slowly retreating form haunted Sandy for the next two or three hours until he could scarcely endure the silence into which he had withdrawn. He cursed himself for a sentimental idiot. "It's the best thing that could have happened," he assured his softening heart. "What's the good of prolonging a useless life like that. It should be a matter of rejoicing."

Nevertheless his mental picture of the fading flag and little Johnny disturbed him all the afternoon.

It was just before closing time that Jack doubtfully approached him, in his arms a carefully carried florist's parcel.

"I—I thought you might like to see it before I took it out to the house," he ventured.

"Sure," answered Sandy gruffly. "What did you get?"

Jack proudly displayed one of those designs into which innocent flowers are tortured, and which custom and florists have convinced gullible humanity are necessary as passports into a better world.

Sandy loathed the sight of them. "That's grand!" he assured the complacent Jack.

"I wish you'd take 'em," the latter suggested, emboldened by the unexpected admiration.

Sandy gazed at him silently. He felt a sudden weakening, as though something snapped in his chest. Irresistibly his hands reached out for the flowers. "Confound you, give them to me! Close my desk!"

When the strange gentleman appeared at the Jackson street tenement, carrying one of those mysterious and fascinating parcels seen only in the "swell" districts, curiosity, succeeded by finger-sucking awe, were aroused in countless small breasts assembled on the doorstep.

First, Death with its dignifying touch had raised the little Johannsen sisters to dizzy heights in the eyes of their admiring compan-

ions. To this was now added the strange gentleman and the wonderful parcel. With unerring directness Sandy singled out the important members of the group.

"Where's your mother?" he asked the elder girl.

She pointed up the stairs excitedly. "Up there. You can't go in; nobody can."

Paying no attention to the child's warning, Sandy mounted the stairs. The task once undertaken, his the grim duty of carrying it through. He knocked gently on the door. In the darkness of the landing he saw nothing, but his hand found the doorknob.

"I told you no one could come in!" cried a woman's voice. "If you children don't—"

Sandy opened the door. "It's all right, Stella," he said quietly. "No one is going to trouble you. I came to see if you needed anything."

"You mustn't come in—you mustn't," she insisted.

His gaze had traveled past her to the quiet little form at rest in "mother's bed." It then followed her pointing finger to the door, on the outside of which a yellow card was fastened. "Diphtheria," he read. For a moment he was startled; not for himself, but for little Johnny. Yet after all Death had come with

swifter, surer strokes than had been expected for the boy, and in the end was kinder.

"That makes no difference to me," he assured the mother. "No, thanks, I won't come in."

"I'd like you to see my Johnny. He's all the man I've had since Olaf went."

So Sandy's heart-strings stretched even further, and he stood beside the bed and looked on the half-promise of a man which lay there.

He could not talk about the boy. "Where is Olaf?" he asked.

"I don't know," the woman answered dully. "It's six months since I've had a word."

"Six months! We'll have to see about that," declared Sandy, although what he could do did not suggest itself. Women were waiting everywhere weeks and months for word of their loved ones, only to hear bad news in the end. How many Olafs would be missing when the war was over, who could tell!

Leaving the flowers where Stella could do with them as she wished when he was gone, he came away from the bed.

"Why did your husband go?" he asked. "Did he volunteer?"

"Yes, he was one of the first. He was al-

ways bothering about his duty to his country."

"Humph!"

"Don't you think it was grand of him?" she questioned wistfully.

"As grand and as necessary as a Fourth of July oration," was Sandy's ambiguous reply.

It satisfied Stella, however, and concluded the conversation on patriotism, of which the flag in the window was the mute symbol.

As Sandy descended the rickety stairs and brushed his way through bereaved sisters and playmates alike, he pondered over the complex question of a man's duty toward home and country. He was several blocks up the street before he realised that he had broken quarantine rules, and that now he ought not spend the evening with the Blue-Eyed Lady as planned, but instead must seek the safety of a drug-store, and the preventive company of disinfectants. Damn that boy, Jack, anyway!

When Stella returned to work the following week, things spiritual, final stage of the mental, possessed her. For days thereafter her quest for consolation was unceasing.

"For God's sake, woman!" finally exclaimed her exasperated mentor, "I'm not a religious man. You must work out your own salvation. What pleases me would shock you.

Find your own spiritual plane—attend all the meetings you hear of, you'll find something."

"I want something to bring me nearer to Olaf and little Johnny," Stella insisted.

"Olaf'll come back all right; you can't lose him."

"I ain't so sure. Do you believe in signs, Mr. Sandy?"

"When they are good ones," he cheerfully assured her.

"Well, I'm awful superstitious. A week before Johnny died I had a sign about Olaf."

"Yes?" Sandy's attention was half-way up a column of figures; he wished she would go.

"His star fell out o' his flag there in the window one day. O' course I picked it up quick and sewed it on again so the children wouldn't see, but—"

"That's no sign, that was just your poor sewing!"

"No." She evidently wished to believe the worst. "My man will never come home."

"All right," agreed her listener, his eye traveling up the thrice-calculated column. "If you will have it so, that settles it. Now, how about that new lot of linen?"

Thus her search for spiritual consolation continued until Mrs. Johannsen's "getting re-

ligion" became a favorite topic among the laundry workers.

There came a day when a new expression in her worn face told of something achieved. She kept her own counsel this time on what the discovery was. For several weeks a lighter step and more cheerful mien told that her long quest had been successful.

"Thank God!" mentally ejaculated Sandy, observing her; and the next time he saw the Blue-Eyed Lady he gave her a new chapter in Stella Johannsen's life-story.

Although curiosity is not an admitted trait in the male sex, something urged Sandy on to investigation. What could it be that Stella had found? Apparently something satisfying to both her mentality and heart. In response to a guarded reference to his joy over her renewed interest in life, she evasively admitted having found a "meeting" that gave her consolation; but it was something "They" didn't like talked about, it was something "secret-like." A queer look came into her eyes as she gazed unseeingly into space.

"I'm soon going to talk to my Olaf and little Johnny," she assured him.

"Oh?" Now Sandy's interest was indeed awakened. "This bears inspection," he thought.

He had no opportunity for gratifying his curiosity for several days. Mrs. Johannsen's increasing number of lapses into faraway gazes impressed him. A remark from Jack one day attracted his attention. "Say, Mrs. J.'s gone clean fluey since she got religion."

Also the number of complaints against her work annoyed him. The moment seemed ripe for decisive action.

Following his reporter's instinct for getting a story he deliberately shadowed the woman one afternoon at dusk when she left the building. He had felt for some time past that she did not go directly home from work. Going up the street, his attention apparently all given to his long cigar, he slowly followed and watched.

The unsuspecting woman gave him a long walk before she finally turned into a doorway in a questionable neighborhood. By the time Sandy had reached the doorway she had disappeared. A long flight of stairs led upward, and at one side there was a closed door. The latter was noncommittal, but at the side of the stairs near the bottom a card was tacked.

"Madame Sylvia," that was all; yet it was enough for the self-appointed detective. He turned away. Later that evening, among the many advertisements which keep our "one

hundred percent American" newspapers alive, his trained eye found this same "Madame Sylvia," with a little fuller information concerning her business than her door-plate had given. It might have passed for a dress-maker's notice to the unwary. Sandy jotted down a few mysterious characters in his notebook, and tucked it away again in his pocket with a supremely satisfied air. He was on the scent now of something interesting. They liked to keep their meetings secret, did they? Well, he would soon share the secret!

It was late afternoon, and except where lamps were lighted, it was quite dark indoors. In a small, stuffy room, one flight up from the street, mysterious forms sat in conclave. Voluminous draperies concealed a corner of the place, and dark-doored cabinets, hiding one knew not what terror, loomed majestically from out of pitch blackness. Pungent perfumes were in the air. Behind a canopied table, and veiled with filmy stuff through which she could be but dimly seen, sat a woman in Oriental dress.

A weird purple light shone over all, while a flicker of many colors, from one knew not where, came and went spasmodically. Mysterious movements behind curtains and cabi-

net doors gave the impression that other beings, mortal or immortal, also occupied the room.

To Stella Johannsen, seated in the center of all, they were immortal. To two men even now mounting the long stairway from the street, who could tell what they might prove to be!

"Do you, Stella Johannsen, wish to speak directly to your husband, Olaf?" droned a voice from behind the filmy draperies.

"Yes—oh, yes!" came the frightened voice of Stella.

"Up to this time I have been your medium," continued the voice from the purple depths. "You have now reached the plane where your own spirit may be permitted to communicate with his—directly with his. Are you ready for the test?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" again came the frightened voice. "Oh, Olaf, are you there?"

The door softly opened and the two men who had mounted the stairs now stood on the threshold. One was a police officer, the other a slight, brown-haired figure. They came unnoticed, and stood there watching.

"Shuh!" The voice from the purple gloom grew slightly menacing. "Until permission is given, you may not address the spirit. Have

you the piece of silver ready for the offering?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" Stella placed a "cart-wheel" dollar on the canopied table. The shadowy form behind the draperies made sure of the offering before the ceremony went on.

"Soul of Olaf Johannsen, are you ready to meet your mortal wife?"

A slight pause ensued, a movement in the cabinet was heard—then silence. Stella half rose, the shock of disappointment distorting her face. The medium repeated her question, this time with careful emphasis. Evidently the soul of Olaf was in a dense mood this evening. Again a shuffling sound was heard, and slowly, as though from untold depths or space came a toneless voice.

"Sure—I want to meet my wife!" it said.

Stella sprang up, her eyes aflame with a wild light. "It's him! It's him! Olaf, where are you? Is Johnny with you? Oh, where are you—where—"

"Silence!" commanded the medium's voice. "Silence, I say!"

A convulsion shook the cabinet. A noise like a mighty fist crashing through wood resounded in the place. A powerful flashlight from the open doorway swept the room. Sandy, following the officer inside, closed and held the door.

The light revealed Stella, half-crazed, standing in the center of the room. Tumbling out of the great cabinet a large man in ragged clothes groped his way toward her. In the excitement of the moment the officer's searchlight neglected to investigate immediately the canopied table with its purple background.

The big man from the cabinet stared stupidly about, then his gaze fastened upon Stella's awe-stricken face. Sandy and the officer, watching, saw the awakening intelligence, after months, perhaps, of inaction, in the soul of Olaf.

The eyes cleared gradually, until a mortal possessed of all his mental faculties stood before the woman. "Well, I'll—be—damned! If it ain't Stella—old girl!"

"Olaf!—Olaf!" she cried, and fell upon his breast.

Next day's write-up in the newspapers was in Sandy's best style. It told of a successful raid on one of the city's long-sought-for and most vicious dens, where innocent people were defrauded and robbed.

It told of the use made of a war-shocked young longshoreman who had returned in a troop train to his home city unbeknown to his

friends and family. Wandering penniless and bereft of his sense he had been captured by the agents of the would-be sorceress, "Madame Sylvia," where he had for several months, in all innocence, played the star part in her comedy of souls.

Of "Madame Sylvia" herself Sandy's account said little. He did not feel it necessary to state that the investigations of the officer had disclosed a vacant seat within the purple shadows, and that up to the time of going to press the whereabouts of "Madame Sylvia" were unknown. The account dwelt at length preferably on the unexpected and dramatic meeting of the husband with his wife who had been decoyed there under pretense of spiritual uplift. It closed in brilliant rhetoric with the sudden return of Olaf's reason at the sound of the voice of his beloved wife.

In spite of all, however, Sandy was not convinced of his success as a religious counselor, Stella's triumphant thanksgivings, combined with her faith in his infallibility, to the contrary.

"Yet we must admit," he said—he was giving the Blue-Eyed Lady the last chapter—"it was my advice that chased Stella to that meeting. I told her she must go on her own. Thank God, my task is done, and she's found

her spiritual consolation in the mighty form of Olaf!"

Over Sandy's face there grew a characteristic expression well-known to his listener.

"Well, what is it *now*?" she asked.

His smile was half-sad, half-humorous. "I'm hoping Stella lets it go at that. It would be a darned shame to call Johnny back into the flesh. Poor kid! His the flowery paths, and golden streets of the blest!" quoth Sandy.

And the Blue-Eyed Lady agreed with him.

THE BLUE-EYED-LADY

As glimpsed through smoke-rings.

*(Showing the one great "exception" to
Sandy's impulse theory, which
"proves the rule!")*

Speaking of whom

Dreaming backward, it seemed to Sandy, there had never been a time when he had not known Her. Somewhere, deep in his consciousness, She had existed. To be sure he had not always realised many details about Her; for instance, that Her eyes were blue. That knowledge did not come to him until one day when he climbed a hillside with Her real self; but whenever he tried to dissociate Her from his early recollections he found bits of Her in all of them.

One by one the many qualities and endearing traits possessed by the Ideal Lady of his heart ranged themselves through successive personalities.

Why, there was Her quiet determination, "demure diplomacy," Sandy called it, and charm of companionship, in little five-year-old Margaret, his first sweetheart back there in the old Ardrossan home. There was the beauty and budding womanliness of fifteen-year-old Mabel, on the farm where he had spent many of his boyhood summers; the sprightliness of Miriam, the young actress, when town life lured him later; the quiet loveliness of his cousin Elizabeth at home; he had always wished more from them, he could not have told what. All this was never wholly realised by Sandy until the wonderful time came when these long-sought traits were discovered miraculously, all combined in the person of one small "Package of Humanity"the Blue-Eyed Lady.

It was at a period, too, of his life when he was least desirous of seeking Her. This he told Her long afterward, and She believed him, for Her absolute faith in him was established from the first.

Picture Sandy, atop of a chair, in a somewhat gay little restaurant where he and a half-dozen friends often met for the evening meal.

Glass in hand he proclaimed his complete

emancipation from womankind. "Never again!" he vehemently declared, amid the jeers of his doubting friends. Not that his experiences had been unusually harrowing. They had been those of a man who lived the average all-round life. For several years an unfortunate venture in matrimony had claimed him; now Sandy was alone. He had called many cities home since the day he left the old world for the new in his first young manhood. The day he touched America's shore was a link in the golden chain which eventually drew him to the Blue-Eyed Lady, but this he did not know until some years after their paths had met.

Journeying ever westward he was finally called to California. In those days San Francisco was a place of sand dunes, and wide, wind-swept stretches on its western border; and there, all unconscious of him, a Blue-Eyed Child had romped and played, and grown to womanhood, dreaming of what Life would bring Her.

Sandy, restless, holding somewhat cynical views about Life in general, and Woman, as he knew her, in particular, crushed down the life-long ideals he had half-consciously cherished, and believed himself immune from all women's lures and graces.

Then came the evening when he stood upon the restaurant chair, and proclaimed his freedom. Even then Destiny was preparing for his surrender, and the triumph of the Blue-Eyed Lady.

Ring One.

Sandy walked the city streets, mildly puffing his long, Italian cigar. His day's work was done. All about him were hurrying crowds. Every now and then his lips sent forth a ring of smoke, and each one he thoughtfully watched, as though fascinated, in the evening haze. What did he see? Encircled in each ring was a shadowy form. He could not see it distinctly, try as he would. Much more clearly he could hear a voice; but how idiotic that was! A woman was composed of more than a voice. In retrospection he went over the afternoon just ended. He saw himself in a roomful of people. Most of these were hazy, and figured now merely as the excuse for the informal talk on a subject of supposedly mutual interest, which he had delivered.

These pictures wavered, and several smoke-rings ascended quite empty. Then that haunting voice came again; what was it it had said?

"I'm glad to meet you," and "Pretty well, thank you;" the last in response to a question of his, "And how is the story going?"

He and the owner of the voice, in company with all the other shadowy forms, had been drinking coffee, and eating slices of that inane cake with which people think they must stuff one at these afternoon affairs. Then ruthlessly the hostess had come and monopolised his attention to the exclusion of all others.

But still that voice, answering several other questions of his, stayed with him as he walked the city streets, until Sandy's whimsey was to find a figure, eyes, and hair to match it; for as yet it had none of these. Only a Personality there was, which made itself felt, and lingered persistently in his consciousness.

The evening waned; fog settled somberly over the city. Sandy turned his footsteps homeward. In his den, "Hades," he took his pipe, tried friend of many seasons; perhaps it would prove more communicative than a cigar. Puff—a fine, big ring floated above him! But, no; the encircled space held nothing more inspiring than a bit of his own wallpaper beyond. Sandy sighed. He settled down to read; but before the morning paper, which he usually read at midnight, was un-

folded, he took out his note-book, and scribbled thoughtfully therein some shorthand characters. "Met the other guest of honor to-day at Mrs. B.'s. She's worth while."

During another hour desultory smoke-rings rose; but the haunting voice was stilled, and Sandy saw no more visions that night.

Ring Two.

One day, several months later, Sandy sat among sheets of manuscript, rapidly reading, and throwing them aside. He was interested, amused, bored, by turns. The story did not especially appeal; the chief character, a girl called "Frank," attracted and held him. Why, it was good stuff, he admitted. No one had created just that type of western heroine before, so far removed from the ordinary, cattle-ranching dope. How long had he had this script? Good God—four months! He must write to the woman. What was it he had written after meeting her that day? "I'll be glad to help you with your work in any way I can;" then—silence of four months! What would she think of him! Tossing aside the last sheet Sandy drew his writing materials to him.

Next morning a Lady and sometime author of stories received a long-expected letter.

It contained a comprehensive criticism of her manuscript. She had given up all hope of an answer weeks since.

"He thinks me just another foolish woman who imagines she can write!" sighed She.

Long afterward She dubbed this period of silence "The Dark Ages."

How exciting it was to receive so unexpectedly a fearless, "honest-to-God" criticism of Her cherished work! The Critic slashed Her plot to pieces; wanted to dash the hopes of Her favorite hero; but "fell in love with Her heroine." Here was balm to Her soul, and food for immediate argument. By return mail "Mr. Critic" received a straightforward response. It justified all Her scenes; refused to eliminate "superfluous characters;" and loved Her own hero! In spite of the Critic's disapproval She insisted upon marrying him to Her heroine.

Of the latter—herself—She spoke little, but was demurely glad that she had been "fallen in love with" by the Critic!

When Sandy read these lines ring after ring ascended, until "Hades" reeked with pipe smoke. He carefully scrutinised each one, but no shadowy glimpse was vouchsafed him; at least, none at all worthy to encompass the

faintly remembered voice. Piqued by a half-admitted curiosity, balked by a wholesale lack of detail, Sandy groaned.

"Good Lord, I wouldn't know the woman if I met her face to face!"

He soon did, however, as Ring Three will show.

Ring Three.

It was evening, and Sandy, well satisfied with his day's employment, stretched his weary limbs and lit his pipe. Confidently he puffed, and turned his gaze upward. There She was, as he had known She would be! Perched upon the edge of a great blue-grey ring appeared a dainty little figure, slender and trim.

"Come out of that, Woman!" quoth Sandy, "and let me look at you!"

At these words She vanished, and even then he had no idea that Her eyes were blue; but other smoke-rings gave him details of the afternoon just past. He saw himself talking with an old friend, a vaudeville actress, in an hotel lobby. They were awaiting the arrival of Someone. Sandy, by letter, had made the appointment.

"She ought to be here now," he said, con-

sulting his watch. "I don't know the Lady by sight, but She *can* write. I believe She'll be able to do what you want."

"How are you going to recognize her?" lazily enquired the actress.

Sandy was anxiously watching the passing streetcars, any one of which might bring the expected Unknown. The actress would just as soon have had Her fail to appear, so long had it been since she had had a good talk with her old friend.

"The Lord only knows!" replied Sandy. "If She speaks first I may know Her." He sprang up and ran out on the sidewalk, leaving his hearer somewhat puzzled by his answer. In a moment he returned bringing a business-like little woman-figure with him, armed with note-book, pencil, and non-committal air of seasoned writer, ready to jot down notes of what the actress wished in the way of a dramatic sketch. No one would have dreamed of the perturbation cavorting under the calm exterior of the Lady; and no one, least of all, Sandy, could have told how he had known that She was the expected Lady even before the car had stopped! She had not spoken first, and it was Sandy who had signalled for the car to stop, because She had

supposed the next street to be Her stopping-place.

So once again these two had met; and Sandy, looking at the figure in the smoke-ring, was vaguely dissatisfied. The business of the afternoon had gone well enough. The actress had been most good-natured. The little Lady's note-book had taken in many mysterious entries, decipherable only to Herself; but, hang it all, She had been altogether concerned with the business upon which Sandy had called them together, and even now he had no very clear idea of what She looked like!

But the memory of a sweet, low voice soothed his tired fancy each time he recalled it; and gradually through his consciousness there crept the force of a Personality which, all unknown then to Sandy, was never to lose its hold.

Ring Four.

This time the smoke frames the vision of a stage, in a hall well-filled with the usual impolite audience attending a charity show.

The majority were there to find as much fault as possible with the amateur talent bravely occupied in trying to "put it over."

Sandy, in a rear seat, was there for one object solely—to witness the performance of a Lady who had given him a card of invita-

tion the day upon which he had arranged a meeting for Her with the vaudeville actress. Now Sandy was in a quandary. Having no program, how was he to know when the particular Lady appeared whom he had come to see! Perish the thought that he would attend an amateur performance lightly, and without some special justification to his own soul!

As he thought it over in "Hades," countless smoke-rings encircled his remembrance of a weary succession of acts; when suddenly in the midst of one a white-clad figure entered. A few lines, spoken in the voice which now so often haunted both his waking and his sleeping hours, brought Sandy to attention. He knew Her! It was the Lady he had come to see! Later She appeared again, an old-fashioned, "Dresden-china" sort of girl, in a tiny drama from Her own pen, in which the other characters sank to insignificance beside Her.

After this he had wandered out into the open air, his duty done; but never before had an obligation of the sort been so mixed with pleasure, although he did not admit the fact at the time.

Many of his impressions of the evening he put into a letter the next day, and this in due time reached the Lady who had played the

part of the "Dresden-china" girl. She received it with delight. It was addressed to Her former heroine, "Frank," and while complimenting Her performance of the previous evening, professed to love "Her," the first heroine, best! This letter put the Lady in a great flutter, and led to an answer; that to a social dinner at the Lady's home, and many other letters and events, all of which leads to the next glimpse of the Lady.

Ring Five.

Churning its passage up the bay, a river-steamer carried two persons who now really knew each other by sight, to one of the small towns, a two-hours' journey from the city. Sandy, reflecting, with slow, deep-drawn puffs saw this picture clearly. How short the wonderful day had been; how wasteful of time in so far as the business accomplished; but how fruitful as to the progress of acquaintance with the still-strange Lady! The trip had been considered necessary in order to meet the vaudeville actress, now filling an engagement in the small town up the bay.

The clearest part of the smoke-ring vision showed the Two on the homeward journey. In a narrow little seat in a secluded corner, the western sun bidding them good-night at the

horizon's edge, the Two chiefly concerned sat and discussed a Chumship. Somehow a relationship of this sort had started.

"What about this Chumship?" demanded Sandy.

"You started it," brazenly asserted the Lady.

"I beg to differ—when?"

"In one of your letters; I have it down in black and white!" Thus, the "demure diplomatist," and then, being a literary Lady, She tried to interest him in a discussion on the madness of Hamlet. This held no charm for him at all, except as it necessitated the use of Her sweet, low voice. So the Chum matter rested in abeyance for a while; but from then on Sandy began to feel something vaguely stirring within him hitherto unknown, as he glimpsed more and more distinctly the pictures of the day just past. It made him uneasy, and going home that evening he regretted that, having talked so much on the trip himself, he had really learned very little about the Lady; and further, knowing so little, he reasoned, it might be as well to see no more of Her! It was just at this hour that She, a lump in Her throat at the thought that, logically, there would be no more occasions to meet him, bethought Her of a tiny ruse—a

thread She might so easily throw out to draw him toward Her again. This took the form of a thoughtful little note which Sandy received the following morning.

"Just good-night, and thank you for a happy day," it said, and was signed with the name of the heroine of Her story.

Ring Six.

Now through a bewildering succession of smoke-rings, both distinct and otherwise, ranged events in the lives of these Two.

Sandy, one evening, leaning against a railing on one of his favorite spots at the top of the city—a bit of stone court and coping forgotten after the great fire devastation—thought over the strange events of the afternoon. He visioned himself and the Lady struggling against the early midsummer wind up a hillside west of the city. At their feet were multitudes of wild flowers; violets, cream-cups, baby-blue-eyes, what not! Whirling down the hill the wild wind whipped the Lady's skirts, and tossed stray locks of hair about Her ears. Sandy made bold to touch one of these locks, and it curled thrillingly round his finger. His own temerity rather abashed him.

"It wants to get there first," he laughed,

indicating the truant curl rioting on ahead of Her.

She laughed, and fell against him, breathless. "Oh, where's the top?" She gasped.

The top of the hill was finally gained; in fact it had two tops, and this became a matter of amusing dispute as to who owned which of them! So fierce was the gale there that Sandy had to hold the slender little Lady down, else the kidnapping wind would have whirled Her lightly off the hill. The fog, too, swept about them in soft, damp, white clouds. What were these Two seeking there above the world? Neither could have told.

Sandy, leaning against the bit of coping, wondered just why they had gone there. No smoke-ring picture told him; but more clearly than all else he heard Her voice saying as they came down the slope again, slipping among the grass and flowers, and into the sunshine; "I'm afraid I'm often selfish."

"Good Lord, you selfish!" he cried. "*I am the selfish one—never you!*"

And visioning Her face, which he was beginning to know was very sweet, he vowed that through him or his selfishness no harm should ever come by word or deed to the little Lady.

Ring Seven.

Curl upon curl they came, great waves breaking on the shining sand. Swirling in they brought tiny shells and bits of moss to the Lady's feet. She and Sandy were enjoying a brisk walk along the beach. Again the wind blew, but this time there was no fog except far out on the horizon line. It might come in tonight and embrace the city, but who cared for that? Not the little Lady.

Many seagulls fussed and chattered in a group on the edge of the sand where great flecks of foam blew about them.

"See!" cried the Lady. "The gulls are having a tea-party!"

"That's just like a woman," chaffed Sandy, "always thinking of tea! Looks more like a convention to me."

"That's a man's thought!" She teased.

This turned the conversation to conventions, and thence by a circuitous route to religion, for subjects between these Two were endless. They dropped down upon the sand and talked, while a yellow dog which had been interested in them all the way, sat down beside them and listened attentively while Sandy laid down the law concerning certain tenets of the orthodox faith which he no longer held, and the Lady contradicted him.

Arguments were rife, sometimes going beyond the bounds of firmness, and reaching "obstinacy," as claimed by one side or the other.

This time "agreement to disagree" was reached; then up sprang the Lady and struck out again, battling with the ocean breeze, across the sand. Perforce Sandy followed, closely shadowed by the yellow dog.

What manner of woman was this, thought Sandy, who tramped in boyish fashion beside him? One who claimed to be in mid-life of experience (although he could not believe it) with a mentality to match his own, and the heart and figure of a girl!

A great, big question-mark began to be noticeable in his mind now after each meeting with Her. What and who could She be, this Woman who was calmly entering every angle of his life? Not entering casually either, but remaining there.

That evening something strongly drew him to read over again the copy of Her story. This time he read from a neatly-bound manuscript with which She had presented him some weeks before. Interest in the leading character again held him from cover to cover. Sandy loved her more than ever. Why, he knew her well, that girl! Where had he met her? She

seemed more than ever familiar to him—what a life-companion she would make! Slowly he laid the volume down, and thoughtfully relit his forgotten pipe. Puff—a splendid, grey-blue ring—and into it immediately floated the heroine of the story!

“You?” cried Sandy.

“Yes, I am She,” came the haunting voice. “Didn’t you know that I am that girl? Oh, dense Sandy—and you never knew!”

But even after this his denseness continued, for he still loved the girl in the story only, not at all realising the inconsistency of it.

Next morning he received one of the Lady’s frequent little notes.

“Beware!” it read. “We are watched! The yellow dog is on our trail!”

It said other things too, immaterial here, and was only one of the many jokes the Lady loved to play.

Ring Eight.

Now had come a time when Sandy made weekly resolves to see the Lady no more save in haloes of smoke, only to scatter broken resolutions at Her feet. These She tenderly picked up and stored away in the Treasure-box of Her heart. For She knew much more about Sandy than he knew about himself at

this time. She, better than he, knew why She perched continually on his smoke-rings; disturbing his work, interfering with his plans, hampering his liberty.

She knew all these things simply because She was a woman. She suspected that She was The Woman, but Sandy himself did not even yet know that Her eyes were blue. This ring discloses how that knowledge came to him. When he viewed the vision his heart stood still.

He saw a cold, foggy morning, and two figures wandering uncertainly up a hillside—uncertain as to direction, not in gait.

Bewildering mist settled down around them the higher they climbed. It damped their clothes, and hung heavy on the high grass through which they strode. Occasional rays of sunlight, streaking through, lighted each blade of green, each flower, and tree-leaf, with a sparkling diamond. Even the Little Lady's stray locks of hair became diamond-starred, and Sandy talked about these, much to Her amusement.

She, tramping staunchly along beside him, hands in pockets of her trim, blue coat, breathed deep, and struck out fearlessly for the top. Not many yards further the path

suddenly ended in a tangle of wild vines and dead branches.

"We're lost!" laughed the Lady.

Sandy laughed also. Himself, lost on a hillside in the fog, with this little trusting Lady! It was a greater jest than She knew!

"Woman, you are in my power!" quoth he melodramatically.

She laughed again, and the mere spell of Her sweet voice led him on, with never a thought save to find the right path.

"I choose this way," She said, finding a faintly-marked trail which became plainer as they went, and finally led them to their goal.

At the summit a circle of young redwoods sheltered a sunny spot. Great bowlders lay there, tossed up in some giants' game of early aeons. The Lady stood, hands in pockets, gazing out between spaces in the trees toward the far-off sparkling waters of the bay, now glimpsed below the over-sweeping fog. She was in Her "mountain mood," Her thoughts, who could tell? Across the narrow basin formed by rocks, Sandy lay, watching this strange Being who had come into his life, and by no will of his own, was fettering him with golden chains.

He wondered of what She was thinking at this moment; he would give his soul to know!

She turned Her eyes toward him, and something definite happened then, for during that long gaze Sandy made a marvelous discovery. Her eyes were blue! She turned away, not knowing of this revelation, yet sensing that She had caught him at some bewildering thought.

Two people walked homeward that evening in a maze of unexpressed emotions, although the conversation was principally about books, and the influence which Ruskin had wielded over Sandy's early life.

Later, in his chair in "Hades" it was his more recent life that the rings encircled, and a little Blue-Eyed Lady smiled out at him from each one; fog-diamonds twinkling among the love-locks above Her pretty ears, and Her hands thrust deep in the pockets of Her blue coat.

And She, the Blue-Eyed Lady, gathered up an armful of his broken resolutions that night, and placed them tenderly in the Treasure-box of Her loving heart.

Ring Nine.

Through pensive, peaceful rings in "Hades" Sandy saw all this that follows; the events of the day just past, the most marvelous he had ever known.

He caught the sound of water bubbling over rocks, and tinkling its way through ferns and tangled vines; mingled with that other sound—the sweetest music in all the world to Sandy's ears—the voice of the Blue-Eyed Lady. Young fir-trees rose spire-like about the Two, and a peaceful, cathedral humor possessed them. Sandy twisted a great, soft leaf into a chalice, and dipped water from the pool for his Lady. Then they sat serene, and rested, for they had tramped far, and the day was warm.

"Listen!" She said softly. "The voices in the stream!"

"Yes; our choir is singing."

"I hope the sermon won't be long!" She sighed.

"Let's not have any," he suggested. "In our world we can do as we like."

This term pleased Her fancy, and She played with it. "Our World!" she cried. "We'll make one all our own!"

"Where you are Queen—and I?"

This was delightful. She saw Herself a stern, autocratic Queen!

"And you—poor you—my minion!"

"A minion sometimes turns!" he warned Her.

The silences grew longer between them,

while the cathedral music swelled and fell away. The tips of the fir-spires caught the last rays of the sun before he dipped below the ridge. The beautiful day was almost done. Sandy looked at the little Comrade sitting there, and knew that all Life, past and future, held no better thing than what She chose to give him. Directly out of the pages of Her own written story She had stepped into his life, and made Her own place there for weal or woe.

And then, because the time had come which all the years in both their lives had led to, Sandy silently laid the love of his great, loyal heart at the Blue-Eyed Lady's feet, for the wasted years which had been, and for all those to come, bring what they would. And She, as silently, accepted this offering, knowing well its value; and in exchange gave him the one true love of Her life.

There was no speech save that of the voices in the stream; no sound save the stirring of the fir-branches; no visible demonstration of this tremendous event save the touch of Sandy's lips on the Blue-Eyed Lady's hand.

The last sun-rays left the firs, and in the evening shadows the air grew chill. The wonderful day ended, as all days must end; but when night came a marvelous, wireless mes-

sage system was established between "Hades" and the abode of the Blue-Eyed Lady.

The inhabitants of the new world formed that day knew that neither Time, Distance, nor any other mundane term could ever more disturb the unity of their two souls. For the old and new had met, and purposed to spend Eternity together.

And so on.....

Many an evening in pleasant weather Sandy saunters up the hill, and meditatively surveys the world from the deserted little court with its bit of broken coping. Turn whichever side he may there is always something to remind him of the Blue-Eyed-Lady. Only a few yards from where he stands, She has told him, She skipped rope, and played many other childish games, in the long ago when he did not know he knew Her.

Far to the west long rays gleam in mid-channel from the lighthouse. Round the treacherous reef the currents ebb and flow. It was there one day they saw, from the nearby cliffs ashore, a tiny rowboat landed, guided by one who knew the dangers.

"What fun," the Blue-Eyed-Lady thought; "to live out there away from all the world!"

"Yes—with *You!*" thought Sandy.

Across the city to the south Sutro Forest Hill looms dark; against it the cross of Lone Mountain silhouettes itself. They have sometimes climbed those heights too, in joyful comradeship in an all-too-short day.

Up and down the bay lights gleam and change. Gliding ferry-boats slip behind Yerba Buena and out again. To the north Alcatraz rides the water like a battle-ship, training her guns out to sea, on the look-out for the ever-expected enemy. Swinging round and round, the long finger of light from her watch-tower points out the dark places. Faithfully it sweeps a wide circle. Sandy's gaze lingers longest over there in the east, where, he likes to fancy, it touches most carefully and lovingly. The stars shine there more tenderly too, he thinks. On the opposite shore, and running far back into the hills, a myriad lights twinkle. Where Sandy gazes oftenest they lie low; it is there his Blue-Eyed-Lady dwells. He leans against the parapet; a hush is over all the world. His pipe is out, cold; but he does not heed it. Smoke-rings do not hold the real things, after all. The Real he holds deep down in his heart—something he would not exchange for all other possessions in the past or future. He will hold this, he

knows, for all Time, whether that means only of earthly ken, or for Eternity. She, the Lady of his dreams is no dream. She is living and breathing in every phase of his existence.

Although their love may never be expressed in all the ways common to ordinary lovers, owing to circumstances which bind Her to a life outside their own dear World, their unfettered spirits are free to soar above this in a communion greater and more satisfying than anything the Two have ever yet experienced. Sandy's restless, rebellious soul has found peace in the haven of Her heart, anchored there by the golden chain of an eternal love.

It grows late; the chill of dawn seems near. Once more the long light sweeps round. From Sandy's soul he breathes a benediction.

"God bless my little Blue-Eyed-Lady!"

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